

Northern Sri Lanka

Jane Derges

University College London

PhD in Social Anthropology

UMI Number: U591568

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U591568

Published by ProQuest LLC 2013. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346



Fig. 1. *Aathumkkaavadi*

DECLARATION

I, Jane Derges, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

Following twenty-five years of civil war between the Sri Lankan government troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a ceasefire was called in February 2002. This truce is now on the point of collapse, due to a break down in talks over the post-war administration of the northern and eastern provinces. These instabilities have led to conflicts within the insurgent ranks as well as political and religious factions in the south. This thesis centres on how the anguish of war and its unresolved aftermath is being communicated among Tamils living in the northern reaches of Sri Lanka. There is an atmosphere of intense mistrust where notions of loyalty and betrayal are demonstrated through speech. Articulating grief, anger and powerlessness is therefore complex within a milieu where there are high levels of both internalised and externalised despair - none more so than among the 'war generation'. The underlying brutalisation created by the war is implicitly recognised as the root cause of much current social unrest. It is also feared that exposure to depictions of violence through access to recently imported modern cultural artefacts, such as videos, have exacerbated the problem. Within this mood of silent tension, communication seems to be taking place through existing, but adapted cultural forms. For the younger generation whose experiences included combat, arrest and torture, it has taken shape through a propitiatory ritual involving inscriptions of pain on the body – *thuukkukkaavadi*, which has increased exponentially in the last ten years. For others, it is through adherence to gang traditions, which have raised considerable anxieties within the local population.

Both 'performances' can be seen as efforts to communicate and articulate the brutalising effects of war through the utilisation of bodies to convey meaning: "(Rituals)...use objects and substances as well as the bodies of the performers to transmit...meta-messages, difficult or even impossible to convey" (Rappaport 1999:252). In this case the message seems to be one of entrapment, anger and disillusionment within a conflict that remains unresolved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DECLARATION	3
ABSTRACT	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	9
Chapter One: Introduction	12
Adapting methodologies	24
Global interactions and influences	31
Tsunami, 2004	34
Part I: 'No war, no peace'	36
Chapter Two: Contextualising war	36
Local geographies	40
An island fortress: militarisation and zones of insecurity	42
A community under siege	50
The losses of war	55
Environmental effects	60
Chapter Three: Discourses of war	64
Colonialism: creating a context for war	66
Post-colonialism: state politics and the case for war is made	69

Contested space: the rise of national militancy	73
The origins of Tamil grievances	75
Constructions of an indigenised 'other'	81
Explorations of the rising violence	86
Part II: Transformations	90
Chapter Four: Changing social realities	90
Native soil: transformations of home	100
Devotional practice amongst the Jaffna Tamils	107
<i>Veera Maranam</i> : 'Heroic death'	113
Caste and class: old categorisations, new social hierarchies	118
Vigilance and protection: living with the times	123
Chapter Five: "Frogs in a well": fear and segregation	128
Tamil youths: provoked and provoking bodies	132
Power, provocation and resistance	140
The humiliations of war	145
Internalised violence and 'cultures of fear'	149
'Thick masks' and silence	155
Ambiguity and rumour	159
Discarded childhoods	162
Chapter Six: The (dis)articulation of suffering	167
The Trauma Discourse: PTSD and social suffering	172
Pathologising suffering	175
Socio-cultural implications of PTSD diagnoses	178
Aid organisations and peace building	183

Part III: The articulate body	188
Chapter Seven: Mediating adversity	188
Ensuring protection from harm	191
Shanthi - <i>vaakku cholluthal</i>	193
<i>Thuukkukkaavadi</i> : the transformation of a ritual	199
‘Lord of the Clouds’: the organiser	211
<i>Kaavadi</i> devotees	216
A <i>thuukkukkaavadi</i> performance	220
A contemporary ‘devotee’	230
<i>Pirathattai</i> : rolling	235
Chapter Eight: ‘Embodied knowledge’: Endurance and survival	238
The body as site of contestation	243
The sacrificial body	248
Cathartic transformations	257
<i>Paravasam</i> : trance	262
Chapter Nine: War with impunity	266
Repercussions	270
ENDNOTES	274
APPENDIX I: Glossary	280
APPENDIX II: Notes on transcription	281
APPENDIX III: Acronyms for Tamil militant organisations	282
BIBLIOGRAPHY	283

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe considerable gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Roland Littlewood for his invaluable advice, support and warm generosity during this entire endeavour. The Anthropology Department at University College London has provided me with the opportunity to listen, learn and benefit from discussions during and outside seminars, and provided considerable inspiration from tutors and fellow students alike. The study was financed by a studentship from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), for which I am indebted as it has allowed me the space and freedom to pursue this project to the fullest. I would also like to thank my Tamil teacher; Mr Swaminathan at the School of Oriental and African Studies, who showed enormous tolerance and good humour over my efforts to grapple with the language, but who also provided me with the essential groundings that enabled my survival in the early days in Jaffna.

In Sri Lanka, I express my deepest gratitude and regard to Professor Daya Somasundaram for providing access, critical and unbiased support. 'Shanthiam' and the Wholistic Health Centre in Jaffna provided me not only with encouragement, but also with many enjoyable and memorable experiences. There are many more individuals who should be mentioned as pivotal to this work, but who cannot be openly recognised despite their hospitality and willingness to share their time and energy with such abundant thoughtfulness and warmth. The current instabilities and ongoing security concerns unfortunately make this impossible. They are the individuals and families who welcomed me into their homes, bravely bestowed their trust and thereby showed me the open-heartedness of the Tamil people. This was a privilege and went beyond all my expectations.

Many thanks also to the Institute for Cultural and Ethnic Studies in Colombo; to Michael Roberts, Patricia Lawrence, Margaret Trawick, Kate Melhopt and Rachel Tribe for interesting and helpful discussions.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Photographs	Page
1. <i>Aathumkkaavadi</i>	2
2. <i>Thuukkukkaavadi</i>	15
3. Catholic shrine	109
4. LTTE Cemetery	115
5. A village (<i>Naga</i>) shrine	195
6. 108 <i>velkal</i> (spears)	202
7. <i>Thullakkaavadi</i>	203
8. Arm <i>velkal</i>	213
9. <i>Aathumkaavadi</i>	218
10. <i>Paravaikkaavadi</i> – Father and son	226
11. <i>Paravaikkaavadi</i>	235
12. <i>Pirathattai</i>	237
13. Trance dancers	265
14. <i>Thondamanaaru</i> temple: <i>theetham</i> ceremony	267

Maps

1. Sri Lanka	9
2. Research area: the Jaffna peninsula	10



Map 1. Sri Lanka



Map 2. Research area: the Jaffna peninsula

Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a study of the consequences of intercommunal violence and its impact on micro-communities. It is located within a small Tamilⁱ community in the northern Jaffnaⁱⁱ peninsula of Sri Lanka; an area geographically isolated since the onset of war some twenty years previously and which, along with the eastern region has borne the brunt of much of the fighting. Most anthropological investigations have taken place in and around Batticaloa in the east, as well as the south; less was known about the experiences of the Tamils living in this relatively homogenised northern region of the country. My initial intention was to explore the narrative structures of post-war reconstruction and recovery, from the particular orientation of ‘traditional healing’ practices. I soon realised that focussing exclusively on identifying ‘healing rituals’ and their role in post-warⁱⁱⁱ recovery would be an exercise in limitation rather than explication, as well as ignore the fact that talking of recovery was premature to say the least.

Instead, what I found was a region under full-scale occupation both from within and outside: the government’s army made up of fellow Sri Lankans but ethnically divided in terms of language, religion and a separate set of grievances, and covert observation and surveillance from within the community itself. It appeared as though many conversations were rendered an exercise in subtext and interpretation, where efforts were constantly being made to establish identity and levels of trustworthiness between conversants. I had to abandon concepts of delineated time in which present and past are separated in a holistic and generally more optimistic framework of peace building and restitution, following on from universal suffering: instead fragmentation and shadows were more in evidence. I discarded pre-conceived concepts of how ‘coming to terms with’ and ‘reflecting on’ a traumatising past would be revealed through local discourses of suffering. Information garnered from ‘traditional’ participant-observation techniques; including a series of in depth interviews to determine how the ‘community’ (whatever that was) was repairing itself were largely inapplicable and had to be adapted. I had not

anticipated the degree of distrust and ambivalence concerning past, present and future, in which expressing almost all thoughts and opinions would hold such fear and risk.

Consequently, these suspicions dominated discursive modes of positioning and the construction of social and political identity, making the negotiation of relationships and subjectivity fraught with the potential for further ostracism. The consequences of a state of social and political marginalisation and threat seemed to bestow a sense of isolation on the inhabitants of the northern peninsula, and contributed to a reluctance in speaking about the personal, by all but a few brave individuals who chose to share some of their ideas and thoughts. Conceptions of post-war stability and safety did not exist: far from it. This was a community still under siege, where a shadow war was taking place in the absence of a state of open combat, where fears of possible repercussions and reprisals informed all aspects of life in an ever-changing political climate of possible betrayal and notions of disloyalty. Otherwise, a reluctance to cogitate on current issues reflected very real and understandable threats, as well as raising questions about the enormity of suffering not only from the recent conflict but also the effects of four hundred years of colonial occupation.

Ideals of 'reflexivity' and open articulation held considerable risk, making the collection of recorded narratives impossible – whatever the media employed; even asking questions about seemingly 'safe' subjects were fraught with complexity when loyalty and trust were privately and sometimes openly questioned. Glimpses of opposing attitudes to the predominant rhetoric were occasionally concealed within innocuous conversations, to be caught and extricated from amongst the usual mundanities of everyday life; eventually requiring a shift in both methodological strategy and theoretical perspective.

Opportunities for private conversations were almost non-existent as all life is lived in the presence and under the scrutiny of others, so that this wariness would have made attempts at narrative construction or linguistic analyses too complex. It could be argued that public discourses: analyses of gossip, rumour, subtext could also offer useful information. Gossip was rife in the north and directed mostly towards individuals perceived as 'distinct' in some way – Tamil returnees for example, often complained of finding themselves recipients of salacious gossip and supposition, as though they had somehow been altered or tainted by their experiences of living abroad. The 'internationals',

comprising INGO workers, researchers and other foreigners were held in suspicion and rumours abounded of the likelihood of spying as well as improprieties of behaviour, and was to be wholly expected in such a context of questioned loyalties, and a protracted history of incursionary influence.

Previously anticipated suppositions of exploring and analysing narrative structure were replaced in the face of the silence and fear with other paradigms, and my attention naturally shifted to absence: what was not being said and where alternative socio-cultural modes of expressiveness might be located. Significantly, memories from the conflict period were seldom spontaneously evoked; they were given terse recognition and questions were usually answered perfunctorily on request, but rarely with any anticipated depth. I learnt that this was not because they held little significance or impact, but rather because they gave rise to such familiarity with fear and horror of both past experiences and the ever present possibility of a return to war – something never far away from people's daily consciousness, most notably during periods of heightened tension.

In terms of a more focussed analysis, I became aware of certain localised performative acts of more recent, notable origin that had increased exponentially. Accordingly, these seemed to provide a more effective way of gaining some measure of understanding in the face of this silent tension – no doubt also influenced by my previous work as an Occupational Therapist, which focuses on the use of non-verbal techniques for managing illness and distress. Accepting the silence partly as an important mechanism of safety, I began to examine the intersection of these collective performative acts: how the body came to inhabit external, public space and how the pain and rage left by the violence of the war was being further replicated as a way of articulating and expressing the unspeakable. Explicit rituals involving bodily pain, and the frequent instances of street violence which propelled itself with some force onto public attention and consciousness, appeared linked: first through specific, organised cultural productions of ritual distress and the second, in seemingly random acts of gang violence, brought about by conditions of rage and despair. These alternative, mimetic forms of expression seemed to relate to previous afflictions, which were then re-enacted through a nexus of self-mortification rituals and secular violence.^{iv} Although I gained sufficient trust from a few

‘interlocutors’^v who allowed me to hear about their concerns, I felt overall a sense that actions were providing better access to their experiences, than words.

As an analysis of silence, I have chosen to focus this study on the role of both spiritual and bodily performance; taking its reference point from the work of literary theorist Elaine Scarry (1985), who explores the destruction of language through violence. Influences also included studies of the impact of social and political domination, analysing how the socially and politically oppressed develop skills to articulate their entrapment that enables some resistance to subjugation and offers a more meaningful position of empowerment within the context of conflict (Scott, 1990; Feldman, 1991; Lawrence, 1998, 2000; Robben, 2000, 2005). Glucklich (2001) has placed the sacred body at the forefront of an analysis of religious suffering that expresses not only religious devotion, but also social oppression and in this regard, has been influential in the study.



Photo 2. *Thuukkukkaavadi*

Through the transformation of a religious ritual, I suggest that the body is posited as an active agent in efforts to reveal the consequences of social and political oppression. Social agency in this instance is at the forefront of not only expressions of distress and anger, but also in providing a sense of empowerment – albeit temporary. By analysing how the violence wrought through war continues to impact on the lives of northern Tamils, I contend that its expression is conveyed both through recent dramatic increases in, and transformations to a specific body ritual: *thuukkukkaavadi*^{vi}. Also significant are newer cultural productions of gang violence as a form of street theatre, taking as their orientation newly imported popular South Indian films.

Throughout this study, the effects of four hundred years of colonial expansionism are also explored and run as a vital thread throughout the text, in recognition of its provocative contribution to the current responses to violence. Experiences of subjugation have filtered into the present through memories: these powerful recollections have been triggered through the current impositions of political violence and humiliation and have lead to the re-concealment and submersion of vocal opposition. Memories of past losses of personal, religious and social authority, have lead many Tamils to utilize a protective shield of silence and ‘wear masks’ when confronted by familiar markers of abusive power relations. In the context of post-colonial instability in Sri Lanka, the relationship between memories of violence, the corresponding silence and the emergence of embodied memories are central concepts. These ‘eloquent’ bodies have come to manifest past and current experiences of violence through both ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1990:54) and transformed - and transformative, rituals. After Halbwachs, this focuses on memory as a response to social and political struggles, and as an important aspect of both identity formation and maintainance.

A common motif of recollected violent memory, is the production of the war memorial as a way of remembering the past (Connerton 1989): widespread in the north of Sri Lanka since the onset of war some thirty years ago. There are many such commemorative structures positioned throughout the Jaffna peninsula, either on permanent sites or assembled on yearly anniversaries. The frequent destruction through bombing to important buildings, commemorative and civic centres (Hindu temples; Catholic churches; an LTTE cemetery; the Jaffna Library with its ancient manuscripts and texts;

hospitals, hotels and cinemas) have been seen by some as efforts to eradicate a Tamil social, cultural and historical memory. Various more transitory ways of not only memorialising the past, but also of keeping Tamil social and cultural identity alive and in the present, are therefore viewed as necessary. These are produced not only through material objects but also through the body; through living, breathing, embodied selves (Connerton 1989). Notably, the majority exist in the form of commemorative images and songs referring to those who have been martyred to the cause of militant opposition to the government: photographs of deceased cadres in newspapers or paintings on enormous cardboard cut-outs and posters, depicting martyrs who have died heroic deaths; the frequently played songs over tannoy dedicated to Tamil fighters. The dying hunger striker displayed in public space, his immortalised body then embalmed and laid out in a glass cabinet in the anatomy department at Jaffna University and his yearly memorial that lasts the duration of the hunger strike. These memorialised combative bodies are displayed as a reminder to Tamils of the sacrifices that have been made and that are, in the context of the uneasy cease-fire, not to be forgotten.

I would suggest that there are other embodied forms of memorial however, that are not part of the militants' discourse; these are the sentient, ephemeral and transformative bodies of the *thukkukkaavadi* devotees. These moveable, fluid and open bodies are multiple and therefore to some extent, freed from the threat of destruction and manipulation. Their numerousness remains immutable and undeniable in an atmosphere of silence and questioned and contested memories. Unlike other memorials, they are not a fixed abstraction to be torn down or desecrated, but paradoxically by their very transience - even as they appear, disappear, and then reappear each year, are ensured a longevity not available to static, regulated memorials as open reminders of war to be destroyed by bombs. In *thuukkukkaavadi* there is uncertainty as to its current significance and meaning, which ostensibly is to convey a message of safety and protection, but the sight of which also provokes a powerful image of suffering. From colonial occupation up to the present political chauvinism, Tamils have fought against the destruction to their social, cultural and religious identity that in the modern context has led to the dispersal and death of families and communities. They have learnt to keep within themselves their

pain and loss in the face of denial and negation; but despite this, efforts are continually being made to articulate these losses.

There have been occasions since independence when recollections of past humiliations through the actions of an 'external' authority or power, have been recognized and associated with current forms of dominance, in turn triggering a reaction correspondent to that of the past. For example, the introduction and instigation of the 'Sinhala Only Act' and declaration of the primacy of Buddhism, brought home forcefully to the Tamils that they lacked legitimacy within their own land, generating in the process, recollections of experiences under colonial occupation. More recently, Tamil legitimacy was again denied when the governments' military came to occupy the northern Jaffna peninsula, bringing with them recollections of previous occupations. In both the past and present, open dissent at political and social injustices have been largely ignored or suppressed; silence therefore became a method by which dignity, safety and some degree of autonomy could be maintained. In the colonial past, keeping secret some social and particularly religious practices, enabled a limited form of resistance to the prevailing hegemony. In the post-independence years, threats and the reality of overwhelming violence without protection, lead many Tamils to place unconsciously their survival in strategies learnt from past experience. By carrying their 'secrets' within them, Tamils created "an authentic inner life" in which to survive (Bastin 1997: 400). 'Memories' became in this instance, agents of fear, signifiers of power and creators of silence in response to repeated acts of subjugation and violence.

As stated, much of the current civil violence arose following the occupation by the governments' military in 1996. This brought the onset of army checkpoints, the loss of freedom of movement and a rising fear amongst most of the population brought about by the continuous house and body searches, arrests and disappearances. Rage at these repeated attacks and humiliations had to be suppressed and subsumed into deference and silence for their protection. During the relatively benign period of the early cease-fire, anger and fear were largely dormant but became more frequently evoked as the cease-fire started to unravel. Violent incidents increased among some who were becoming increasingly frustrated and aggravated at the lack of progress in their lives.

Within this framework, efforts to express this entrapment have been encapsulated foremost amongst the younger generation. Their fear and distress seems to be most forcefully demonstrated through embodied acts of personal test and challenge that are both ritualised and painful. Although differing in method, I would suggest that these performances articulate their experiences of war and violence without the requirement of verbal, and therefore threatening, explication.

Memories of a past in which silence was both necessitated and protective, has been recollected and expressed not through discursive practices, but in this instance through these bodily re-enactments of violence, some of which are self-destructive and some more empowering. These social and religious shifts and transformations among the Tamil youth, bely any implication that silence is a sign of weakness or passivity: far from it^{vii}. The silence of the civilian population was necessitated, as was their need to find alternative means with which to express their dilemmas and suffering. Certain ritual practices and even adherence to gang traditions, have a place if not in active or successful resistance then certainly in articulating the oppressive and humiliating pressures under which the Tamils of the north have been living for the last decade - and of course, much further back.

Bastin (1997) remarks on the form that resistance took during the British colonial period, when the wearing of “masks” hid the true authority and adherence that many Tamils maintained towards Hinduism, rather than Christianity, refuting any notion of passivity and victimhood as the sole experience of Tamils under colonial rule. This was evinced by the speed with which temples were reconstructed and the large numbers of Tamils who reverted back to Hinduism following independence. Sartre (1963), in talking about colonialism - and rituals and spirit possession in particular, states: “formerly this was a religious experience in all its simplicity.....now they make it a weapon against humiliation and despair” (p. 232); it is also a way of expressing through “mimes...the refusal they cannot utter”, due to the schism forced upon the colonised who must accommodate the colonisers world, as well as their own. According to Sartre their suppressed rage emerges as a self-destructive, internalised violence: “in order to free themselves they even massacre each other. The different tribes fight between themselves

since they cannot face their real enemy – and you can count on colonial policy to keep up their rivalries” (p.232).

It is still common to hear references to the activities of the British in Ceylon in a positive light, whilst criticism is easily dismissed as irrelevant and ‘in the past’. Bourdieu (2004) contributes to discussions of post-coloniality by describing the “*misrecognition*” (authors’ italics) by those who at a conscious level are unaware of the symbolic violence perpetrated against them. He cites gender as an exemplar of this; where subtle levels of discrimination within male dominated society have seen women at times become their own harshest and most unforgiving moral critics. But this applies equally to the ‘misrecognition’ of colonial violence in Sri Lanka. On the one occasion when I did hear criticism of the British colonists, the speaker was described to me as “mad”. However, the more recent incursions of foreign influx and influence through the Norwegian peace monitors, the INGOs, foreign researchers and returning Tamils, more easily arouse suspicions. These relate not only to past memories but also to fears of a perceived neo-colonial modernity from the west, which seems to have given rise to formerly submerged feelings of fear.

Despite the cease-fire, accessibility to the perpetrators of both past and present tyrannies through ‘truth and reconciliation commissions’, ‘human rights’ and ‘peace-building’ activities are far from possible in the present climate in Sri Lanka where most of the perpetrators are either long gone, or remain at a distance in positions of power. Although the colonialists have left, fears of the newer arrivals in the form of modernist, western based aid and peace organisations who have arrived to help ‘restructure’ and rebuild communities, has arisen. Meanwhile the politicians remain at a distance in Colombo and the LTTE, having infiltrated deep into most Tamil lives, engender feelings of extreme ambivalence: hope, terror, devotion and fear alike. These fears are articulated on many levels: violence is turned inwards towards the self or those in close proximity; mistrust towards neighbour and some family members is the norm and silence prevails towards all but the trusted few.

Scott (1990) examines the undercurrents of how dominant discourses and power relations are played out among both oppressor and oppressed. In the form of veiled speech acts and behaviours, this enables some ventilation of the frustrations and limitations imposed by

systems of power. In doing so, it helps perpetuate the social order of hegemonic structures that maintains social categories of subordination and oppression – until open rebellion and resistance evolves. Where I would develop his theory, and also link it with Scarry's model of language and 'the body in pain', is to examine what takes place when there are *two* or more elite groups in competition with each other, seeking primacy of control over the oppressed. In Sri Lanka, the government and the LTTE are both in competition for power and domination. Those who were once a powerless minority – the Tamils, then formed themselves into numerous militant organisations over which one became the dominant authority in the north and east: the LTTE. They managed to eradicate all other oppositional voices to the hegemony of the south, and branded themselves the upholders of the mandate of the Tamil people.

Neither militants nor government has complete control and in order to achieve it, each must demonstrate the ineptitude of the other - as well as their own competence. To accomplish this, certain kinds of insubordination among the powerless are permitted, which enables each to apportion blame to the other for their failure to maintain law and control. Paradoxically, these acts of violence and misdemeanour by the oppressed strengthens the agenda of those in battle to attain their position of total power and domination. As the stakes rise, the 'petty acts of sedition' are allowed to become more overt, hostile - and even have to be incited by the oppressors in order to allow each faction to hold the other culpable. There is therefore a twofold 'public transcript' that is in question and disputed: who is the stronger and who owns the Tamil 'hearts and minds'. Accusations and counter-accusations muddy the waters of clarity and truth so that it is impossible to know what is fact and what is propaganda. In this context, with two factions vying for domination, 'feigning deference' using Scotts' model, becomes a complex task for the oppressed that can only be responded to publicly, with silence. The hidden or private transcript takes place only among the most trusted associates because outside this network, loyalties are divided. Oppression through the divisiveness of suspicion and silence destroys all but a small fraction of a sense of community and fellowship; the consequence of this is further isolation, enforced passivity and the continuation of violence.

While awaiting their fate however, some of the powerless have begun to express their entrapment and embattlement through public, performative acts that graphically portray their status within the current social context. This transcript could be said to be both public and private; it takes place in public space, but also gives a demonstration of private or hidden truth/opinion. Although unspoken, these acts seem to publicly articulate the distress of the community, illustrating the ongoing rage and violence around them. Despite this, I would surmise that the gang members in particular achieve only a limited sense of brief empowerment through their terrorisation of the community, due perhaps to their greater brutalisation. They have to some extent been duped and manipulated into acting aggressively and with impunity by their oppressors, as both a lesson to the Tamil community concerning the consequences of misbehaviour, and as a pawn in the overall struggle between the competing, dominant factions. The *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees also display the pain and confinement of a community living under siege but in contrast, universally acknowledge the sense of empowerment this brings. They seem to remain largely outside the manoeuvring of the oppressors and have found a way to maintain some autonomy, albeit limited.

These reenactments of violence and suffering, both towards the self and others are expressed through the body at a time when open verbal dissent is unsafe. Culturally codified forms of expression have existed for many decades in Jaffna: gangs operated before the war and *thuukkukkaavadi* rituals were performed from the 1960s onwards. However, inter-gang fighting seldom impacted on the wider community and the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees, small in number, came mostly from among the criminal population who had made vows (*nertri*) to be released from incarceration. But it is the dramatic increase and new formation that is significant: they both evolved after the arrival of the Sri Lankan army in 1996, to occupy the northern peninsula. Simultaneously, imprisonments under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1979) were enforced on a wide scale, involving the torture of many Tamils; disappearances on the Jaffna peninsula rose to one hundred, within one year alone. Also, following the continued war-mongering from the militants and their humiliation of the Tamils of the north, this resulted in some loss of support for their movement (Somasundaram 1998). The combination of increasing

attack from the state and the manipulation of the various militant factions, many Tamils felt increasingly isolated and unable to assert themselves.

In Feldman's (1991) study of power relations, he places the body at the forefront of political agency not as a fixed or static entity, but relational. The body is political text staged: to be moved and arranged to suit the biased pretext of the powerful, in similar terms to the commodification of things, according to Feldman. This is of course contingent on domination of the space; possession of the space is an essential component of power structures that seek to control and organise these entities within politically occupied spheres. Therefore the body becomes "a spatial unit of power" (p.8) and political violence involves the "production, exchange, and ideological consumption" (p.9) of these bodies. As part of this negotiation, Feldman uses the example of how control of the political body is wrested to and fro within the space of the interrogation in the setting of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Through his body, the prisoner instigates the inevitable sequence of torture, taking back some of the control - the loss of which is, of course, its essence.

This wresting of power by the oppressed from the oppressor, is also seen in acts of 'symbolic inversion'; an act with which Feldman's subject could also be said to engage. Power is transferred from oppressor to oppressed in the form of a symbolic inversion that uses metaphors from popular cultural imagery, as well as for real in rebellious movements, such as the French Revolution. Direct and open ridicule of figures in authority are absent in Jaffna: there are no carnivalesque displays or opportunities to revile popular figures in jest; there are no ribald cartoons or journalistic critiques of politics or political figures in the north. One of the few times I remember being aware of a more derisory, but still cautious response was when watching TV news footage with some friends concerning a scuffle that had broken out in Parliament at the swearing in ceremony of the newly formed party of politicised Bhuddist monks called the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), in 2004. The ceremony ended in humiliation and a loss of dignity and respect for these monks who were forcefully manhandled by their parliamentary colleagues in efforts to prevent them attaining the platform. This produced some wry amusement and recalled their own experiences of witnessing political and religious figureheads ridiculed and ignored.

Cultural productions and artefacts of protest and dissent come mainly from within the LTTE and are serious, unequivocal messages aimed at the southern polity, in demand of their own clear political agenda. From the south, there also appears to be a taboo on representations of the LTTE in cartoon or jest, although their own politicians are fair game. Subsequently, I became interested in how control of the space might be secured from these political elites in the face of overwhelming silence, and the violence of extreme oppression expressed within the context of the north.

Adapting methodologies

Undertaking research in societies that have lived through war requires particular sensitivity to issues of trust, ethical practice and safety of 'interlocutors' ('informants' being a particularly inappropriate term in former war zones). In a society that is not yet at the stage of 'post-war recovery', there are many challenges to be addressed in terms of methodological practice that require considerable thought, adaptation and an acceptance of a state of ignorance in certain aspects of the enquiry.

The population is weary, exhausted and not in the best frame of mind to answer questions from researchers about how they feel, how they are coping with trauma, and how they perceive their futures. There is little desire to share their losses with strangers and explain or articulate their experiences with the threat of further hostilities on the horizon. There is an inevitable invasiveness to any form of research including participant-observation, but to minimise the effect of this for those who have already experienced invasion of an albeit less benign type, new strategies have to be employed. I abandoned early on any thoughts of formal, structured interviewing, taping or questionnaires, instead trying to develop a way of obtaining useful information that focussed on non-verbal techniques. I maintained fairly low expectations about what information could be gained from talking about difficult and sensitive subjects, learning that this could not be granted to outsiders even ones who were around for some considerable time. I took opportunities that were offered and followed leads rather than actively directed the research on any particular

course. This often took me on interesting journeys that provided useful insights. My questions, although having some direction in my mind arose in response to information that I was handed. It could be argued that by following, rather than leading I only heard about those things that people wished me to hear and may have missed what was really going on beneath the surface. I would contest this as I believe what one is told, only represents one aspect of social interaction and by observing social behaviour, conversational content and style, body language, facial expression, and time and spatial interactions, this provided me with a more complete view.

At the time of my arrival in July 2003, the cease-fire had been in operation for just over a year. After the initial relief and undoubted euphoria – albeit tinged with wariness, there was a break-down in talks between the government and the LTTE in April 2003, which heralded a gradual deterioration in the political and social landscape of the north and east. The atmosphere was one of great ambivalence towards the possibility of peace and as stated, considerable exhaustion after so long a period of war – many stated that this was the last and final opportunity for peace. My initial wish was to be able to live with a family, but I was immediately aware of the strain this would impose on people uneasy with strangers and exhausted after years of struggle. For the first five months I lived in a house which was owned by exiled Tamils and managed by a relative who also owned a guest house; he arranged for me to stay nearby in the house of a Tamil Christian family who were renting his relatives' property, with a room kept aside for visitors. This put me in contact with a family and provided the possibility to understand more about family life and help me practice my Tamil language skills, whilst maintaining some measure of privacy for both them and myself. They proved to be more than generous after initiating contact: curious as to who I was, and what I was doing there. Initially they found my interest and desire to learn the language incomprehensible and suspicious - there was both a combined curiosity and questioning of my motives. I was eventually accepted into their midst after it was realised that my attempts at grappling with the language, my ineptitude in all domestic tasks as well as negotiating and orienting myself, must indicate that I was not part of any spy network (I was later told that it was likely that checks had been carried out to authenticate my identity). I got to know them sufficiently well for them to become eventually unconcerned with me and allow a degree of openness

between us. I also remained in contact with the guesthouse owners who possessed one of the few telephone and internet facilities in the area and this gave me access to meeting people. As one of the few guesthouses in existence at that time, I met a number of visiting International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) staff, and other interested observers – journalists, a small number of fellow researchers, as well as several Tamils visiting after a long absence.

The house was located in a very mixed neighbourhood, comprising a large Catholic fishing community, and a few Hindu families. Many had been displaced from other parts of the peninsula and the string of islands lying to the northwest. Their homes had been either destroyed by bombing or were taken over by the Sri Lankan army in areas that now lay in what were defined as the High Security Zones (HSZ), mostly along the coastal regions and the fertile agricultural lands around Palali military air base in the north. Bordering onto the back of the house, was a ‘colony’: a government housing scheme of mostly palmyra thatched huts, situated in extreme proximity to one another and largely segregated from the rest of the population by fencing and brick walls; again mostly displaced families were housed here. Conditions were cramped, overcrowded, with a general lack of privacy, and reported high levels of alcoholism and violence. Parts of the area had a reputation for its local gangs, and violent incidents were a sporadic reality – most located around a small *kulam* (pond) and cross-roads with a large tree in the center where *kassippu*^{viii} drinkers gathered. These incidents took place after dark when, due to an absence of street lighting, crime was more easily perpetrated. There were a couple of small grocery stores, a bicycle repair shop and a “Cool Bar”, which also sold alcohol and was a popular local meeting point. A large Catholic church, which often held services transmitted by loud speaker to the local populace, small Pillaiyar temple that similarly broadcast its six times daily *pujas*, a large school and some of the INGO offices were situated close by. The properties all afforded high levels of privacy, most being set back from the road and surrounded by high walls and fences. All the INGO offices had security gates and guards and were in a noticeably better state of repair than their Tamil neighbours’ houses. Close scrutiny of the road was maintained when the family were at home; if there was any noise from the street, the gate being opened (usually deliberately left unholed to alert the family to visitors) or any other sounds, someone – usually the

most senior member of the family present, would look up or go and investigate. Once safety was assured or curiosity appeased, attention resumed to whatever activity had been interrupted. At night doors were locked and a wooden cross-bar was applied to the door,^{ix} the mother as most senior family member waiting up for the last person to return home; seldom later than about eight in the evening. After eating at the guesthouse, I would be accompanied home as it was deemed unsafe to be out alone and besides, it was pitch dark due to the absence of street lighting and roads were pocked with craters and holes.

Following this period of five months after which the family moved house, I met a Tamil Hindu family and lived with them for the remaining ten months of my stay. They lived close to the first family and so I was able to maintain all my contacts and continued to visit regularly. Their home was situated in a village that had become subsumed into a suburban district of the main town – the entire peninsula had the feel of a large village: its boundaries and borders difficult to distinguish, apart from the HSZs. At its centre was a large Murugan Temple with a yearly annual festival attended by not only Tamil Hindus from across the peninsula, but also Tamils making the journey from abroad, many for the first time following the ceasefire. Some Catholic Tamils also visited at festival time to shop in the market-lined streets replete with trinket stalls, domestic produce and ice cream shops. This area housed mostly middle-class Tamil Hindus, who had chosen to live within close proximity to the temple and in the sight – *darshan*, of Lord Murugan, (also known as Alankaran Kanthan – ‘Lord of exquisite adornment’) consequently much of the activity in the area revolved around the temple. Large social halls supplied free food, daily; many Hindu religious educational centres were located there – the Aarthinam: a Saiva Siddhanta temple foundation; a temple dedicated to the sages Yogaswami and Subramaniaswami, as well as various smaller Amman and Pillaiyar temples, located close by. Consequently it was a place that many devout Hindus from other parts of the peninsula came to, as well as some less devout individuals who because of its large open spaces – unusual in the labyrinthine passages of the rest of the town, used it as a gathering place to meet friends and for some, as a focus for challenge and dissent in this most holy of sites in the town. Its reputation for wealth, affluence and religiosity made it at times a target for the disaffected. There was an army camp close by and the usual military checkpoints at every cross roads, regulated by armed soldiers in

bunkers that were manned but inactive since the ceasefire, and that had become a part of a daily landscape largely tolerated, but not accepted.

I shared mealtimes, visits to friends, relatives, outings together and evenings spent in front of the T.V or sitting outside the temple, chatting. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to live and get to know these families who shared their lives with me in great generosity and openness. I learnt about aspects of Tamil life that would not have been possible had I lived in more remote, detached circumstances and it provided me with a situation of safety - offered despite the suspicions aroused by strangers; the families frequently had to tolerate questions about who I was, what I was doing there, how had we met and 'how-did-they-know-that-I-was-who-I-said-I-was'. I was asked not only to provide biographic data, but also to furnish some explanation of the purpose of my study and my general level of trustworthiness was regularly assessed, although complete reassurance proved difficult on a few occasions. This was borne by my friends with a large measure of understanding, tolerance and dry humour, but there were also occasions I know, when it was irritating and wearing.

During the period of my fieldwork from July 2003 until November 2004, there were only a small number of international aid workers and researchers inhabiting the peninsula, who were therefore highly visible. The majority were based in the numerous large INGOs, and there were also the peace monitors – the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM). My presence in the surrounding suburban and village areas whether alone on my bicycle or a passenger on friends' motorbikes drew more or less constant attention and I was immediately conspicuous, sometimes arousing suspicion but also friendly curiosity. My position was unusual in terms of how most foreigners were perceived in the north: I was not allied to any organisation or group, I was unaccompanied, did not appear to be 'doing' anything – there was little intelligibility to my daily occupation which appeared from the outside to consist mainly of 'hanging out' and spending a lot of time at the temples, consequently I was occasionally openly accused of being a spy for the Government or the CIA. I was not alone in this however; suspicions were generally easily aroused within the community. There were frequent stories and rumours concerning individuals who had apparently perpetrated some moral, social or criminal offence for which often the LTTE were brought in to mediate – the army and police were Sinhalese

and mostly unable to speak Tamil, which posed difficulties in reporting cases: they were also criticised for inaction, but when they did intervene a riot very often ensued. Spending some time with two local NGOs offered greater legitimacy to my presence however, and at the same time afforded me an opportunity to meet, get to know and learn more about life on the peninsula.

I was told that many people “wore masks” and would not speak about their fears to each other and that even trust among friends held some reservations. If this were the case, how could I as an ‘outsider’ and western foreigner possibly hope to gain useful information? Conversely, but exasperatingly I occasionally received unwarranted attention as a British citizen, a hang-over from the colonial era. This was a barrier at times; I would find myself whisked to the front of queues, put in special seating at public events, asked to “say a few words” at openings or celebratory events or generally be given undue and unwarranted attention. Protestation was largely unsuccessful and greeted with incomprehension, but also rejection would have been offensive and insulting. I had expected this at the outset and had hoped that in time the attention would fade, but as I lived in a fairly densely populated area as opposed to a small, isolated village this was not to be the case and I learnt to tolerate and accept this as inevitable. Despite these dilemmas, there was also an enthusiastic desire to impart knowledge about “*engalooda panbaadu*” (our culture), their lives and experiences and of course, to practice English: an important source of advancement in society, even now. I was able to gain access to people, events and situations far beyond most of my expectations in terms of the research that I wished to carry out, considering the complexity of the setting. Many people wanted to share parts of their stories, aspects of their plight and some of their experiences from life – not solely related to the war, in the hope that others would understand them better and this helped encourage people to accept me up to a point, in their midst. Total acceptance however, was out of the question in a community which views even its own citizens with suspicion – silence was familiar, not only for me.

Some of these predicaments lead me to question the more traditional methodologies and strategies of ethnographic fieldwork: interviewing, participant/observation and some of the received terminology. As Daniels (1996) suggests, terms such as ‘informant’, ‘informing’, even ‘interview’ have dual implications in settings where family members

have been tortured or accused of spying, informing and betrayal. To avoid fixed abstractions and labels, alternative terms can clarify and elucidate meanings through varied idioms, according to circumstance and person. Recording interviews using a tape recorder was therefore out of the question, whereas requesting permission to take notes was easier in one to one sessions. Photography and taking photos was surprisingly well tolerated and usually openly encouraged at most ceremonies and rituals. Photographs have a special place for many Tamils who always have a photo album that they are eager to show with pictures of celebrations of key life events. I decided to use photographs as a key source of information of ritual performances; it was an efficient method of recording these complex events where there were a lot of details and ceremonial minutiae and I could give copies of photos afterwards, if desired. But also it was in keeping with a major theme of the research: silence. There were some prohibitions on photographing certain people, events and sites that were considered too sensitive - military installations, check points, rallies or even one of the key fishing ports in Jaffna.

Of course photos are partial, showing subjective aspects of the events being recorded and can be a distortion of reality; they were always therefore backed up with notes. The few formal interviews I undertook were either one-to-one, or with a large number of people present observing: family members, friends and villagers, sometimes as many as twenty or more people would gather to watch. The group interviews yielded specific, but limited information, none of it especially confidential or private but did give me access to a larger number of opinions and ideas, from a variety of sources. One-to-one interviews were more private but gave one perspective only. Data gathered from informal settings and conversations yielded the most information, which due to their spontaneous nature gave rise to more intimate and maybe, honest accounts. 'Mobile' interview settings provided opportunities that triggered particular memories and impressions not so easily accessible in more static settings. Examples were conversations held on buses, boats, on my bicycle, on walks or visits to locales outside the peninsula.

Typically those who I got to know well were inevitably more willing to talk about their experiences and the more difficult subjects of loss, change, and the effects of the war. Inevitably, confidentiality, trust and safety are massive issues in a community where critical dialogue can carry connotations of spying, treachery, betrayal, 'informing' and

are powerful forces in silencing and self-censure. I share some aspects of this self-censorship and consequently this is necessitated and reflected in this dissertation. Concomitant with this is an inability to judge people and situations and what are genuine concerns and fears and what are fears perpetuated as a method of control – whatever these are, they have powerful influences over community and anthropologist. I occasionally received cautions about speaking to certain individuals or organisations and was warned about the probability of being followed. Levels of trust also fluctuated according to the progress of the peace talks; there was a distinct deterioration in the talks between the Government and the LTTE over the time I spent in the north and accusations of espionage towards myself subsequently escalated, also around the time of the contentious general elections of April 2004. Infiltration by spies was a readily accepted fact amongst not only locals, but the international community living in and visiting the peninsula, which made accusations wholly understandable and consequently more tolerable. Priority among the northern inhabitants still seems to lie with being defended against outrages perpetrated against them by the government of the south.

Global interactions and influences

There are extensively sited, and multifarious local and international non-governmental organisations in the north that provide practical support in terms of rebuilding works, demining operations, counselling and support for local community leaders, education on ‘peace building skills’ and many other aspects besides. Rebuilding the infrastructure of the north is slow; there are frequent hold-ups due to conflicted interests of political and economic power concerning the devolution and distribution of funds through the various parties involved in the peace process. The December 2004 Asian tsunami, which hit nearly all the coastal regions of Sri Lanka, including the already decimated east and north of the country, brought these complexities into sharp focus. It became apparent that unresolved questions of governance and responsibility between the politicians in the south and the militants in the north and east, could prevent the full distribution of aid.

Despite this, some physical rebuilding, although not quick or straight forward is relatively manifest, in contrast to the emotional costs affecting many in the north. In the area of health, the local NGOs work alongside some of the healers^x who are widely sought for their knowledge, expertise and understanding. There is less direct communication between the international aid workers and local healers, although each is aware of the others' existence. In their task to provide 'psycho-social rehabilitation' – which consists primarily of counselling, the INGO workers complain of indifference because many of the recipients want "practical support, not counselling" (statement made by one international aid worker). The local community perceive foreign counsellors, as fundamentally different from themselves in terms of language, lifestyle, attitudes to gender, identity and religion - as they do with most outsiders, and therefore unable to relate to their experiences, especially those of war. This is in contrast to the local NGO workers, all of whom have shared in the suffering of their fellow Tamils and to that extent, have a measure of understanding absent in the foreign aid workers, researchers and even many relatives from abroad. Acceptance therefore depends a lot on how much one is willing to acknowledge and operate within this framework.

The present concerns of the Jaffna Tamils can be located within the context of rapid changes both within their immediate environment and at a global level. By identifying some of their current dilemmas, it is possible to understand the impact modernisation is having on this micro community as they work towards a process of reconciliation with the past, but within an uncertain future. These dilemmas exist within a climate of fear and instability following twenty-five or more years of war. There is an ongoing state of "no war, but no peace" - a commonly heard expression, as this continuing chronic violence serves to destabilise the country even further. This has meant that rehabilitation, rebuilding, greater trade opportunities and economic development have been slow and in some cases ceased altogether. The return of families who had been displaced elsewhere on the island has taken place in part, but the anticipated return of relatives from abroad, other than on brief visits, has not.

There are also concerns about the Tamil youth in the north; the young women are under a self-imposed curfew because of the young males whose domain has become the streets after dark. There are regular reports of brutal gang fights, attacks on women are both a

fear and a reality; frequent conversations with younger women in Jaffna come round to fears of the males in their midst who are accused of offences ranging from making inappropriate jokes to gang rape. Also related to this, are concerns about the influence of the outside world that is encroaching on this once isolated community; greater access to pornography and alcohol, as well as changes to dress style, music, film and video are linked to behavioural changes in some youths. There are worries about reported increases in HIV/AIDS, whether statistically factual or speculation^{xi} and ‘outsiders’ or ‘others’ are often viewed with suspicion, whether aid workers, returning “foreign” Tamils or student researchers.

The LTTE are known to want greater transparency and accountability from the large INGOs and wish for a more active role themselves in the distribution of aid. Within their own territory in the Vanni to the south they are involved, and frequently intervene in the distribution of equipment and materials from the aid organisations. Whether these accusations concerning a lack of accountability on the part of the INGOs or the moral degradation of the Tamil populace are fair, is a matter of conjecture. Some suggest that instilling fear into the population will increase the mistrust of outsiders and thereby diminish unwanted western influence. Some view this as a sensible precaution in the light of a perception of moral turpitude and degradation observed in western society. This impression encompasses many exiled Tamils, especially those from western countries, who are referred to as “*engalooda velinaattukkarerkal*” or “our foreigners”. Their visits are sometimes received with ambivalence; on the one hand there is the joy of renewed acquaintanceship and the chance to rebuild their village communities, temples and family networks. On the other side, there are fears that these returning Tamils will create further dislocation among families who have already been displaced, by reclaiming their properties either to sell or rent out at increased rates. There are fears that relatives may have forgotten their roots, language, faith and become overly influenced by western values and mores. This is perceived through the obvious wealth of these relatives, which is a source of both pride and concern at the changing fortunes within these now disparate families.

Many of these worries are compounded by the social consequences of war on this once affluent community; increases in poverty and overcrowding have lead to an increase in

cases of sexual harassment and abuse of women; the increased numbers of widows and single females find themselves particular targets. There are large army camps throughout the peninsula and the islands, with thousands of unoccupied soldiers who raise the levels of fear among many women. There are also large groups of unemployed, disaffected and brutalised Tamil youths and burglaries have increased as well as instances of both petty and violent crime.

The inhabitants of the north are confronted with the challenges of re-entering a world that has been largely inaccessible to them for many years. There have been changes and developments that present them with choices and dilemmas concerning their place in the world. The impact of modernisation is often greeted with a mixture of pleasure, consternation, curiosity and dismay and for some, raises a more complex dilemma than the war itself. The war has seen the destruction of a way of life and the disruption to many socio-cultural practices, but now there are other realities confronting the Tamils following the ceasefire – the further loss and destruction as many see it, to their way of life through the impact of the outside world, which is readily accessible but holds some threat. These differing elements – recovery from the immense trauma of the past now compounded by the 2004 tsunami, ongoing political and insurrectionary instability and the impact of global influences have all had a huge and ongoing impact on the population.

Tsunami, 2004

In December 2004 a tsunami wave hit the entire south Asian shoreline, including about 75% of Sri Lanka's coastal areas. The north was not exempt from this catastrophe and it contributed to an overall feeling of despair - especially among the fishing communities. The population from these regions were already enduring intense difficulties wrought by the war; their livelihoods had been severely compromised due to restrictions imposed on where and how they could fish. Their mostly isolated locations and positions making them easy targets both for recruitment by the militants, and pressure from the army. The effect of the tsunami merely added to their existing hardships and there have been

repercussions to their resilience in overcoming this new tragedy. On visiting the fishing villages along the north coast after the tsunami, there was a palpable sense of the frustrations and hopelessness felt by people who had already lost so much. They now had to come to terms with the loss of their children, wives and sisters who were working and playing on or near the beaches when the waves came. Many of the fishermen believe they are culpable for these deaths, and also say the sea gods have demonstrated their anger because of a lack of devotion. Men are blamed by families for not protecting their wives, elders, children and sisters and the army is blamed for the death of many women whose long hair and saris became entangled in the vast network of dislodged rolls of barbed wire that line large sections of the beaches all along the northern shores. Many are now fearful of the sea; some fishermen are reluctant to return to their trade, whilst others force themselves, and a few drink heavily and mourn their losses. They avoid the water that for much of their lives has been a source of sustenance and life, but now presents a danger from wrathful sea gods.

There was talk of people's resilience too and how their previous exposure to displacement and destruction had enabled them to immediately begin rebuilding villages and homes. Locally positioned NGOs were able to respond immediately and were at work the following day, providing practical help and support. Some criticism was directed at the international agencies that brought in recently trained counsellors to the affected areas, without recognising the need to attend to local requests, or utilise the experience of those already present (Galapatti 2003). There were also problems in managing and distributing the massive funds that poured into the country after the appeals worldwide, partly through lengthy bureaucratic processes, but also because of political wrangling and delays. So far, it is mostly temporary housing in camps and some fishing vessels that have been provided.

The landscape has changed in more ways than expected: apart from the changing shoreline and destruction to houses along the beach fronts, there are the brand new fibre-glass fishing boats with outboard motors and clearly displayed INGO insignia. There is a profusion of large hoardings along the coastal road advertising the presence of more INGOs who have moved into the area, and there are new camps built side by side, but segregated from the older 'internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps. On visiting two of

these settlements, it was clear that a growing resentment was evolving between the two groups of displaced Tamils: those from the war and those from the tsunami. The war displaced families, many of whom have been waiting for over a decade to be re-housed, and have heard that their new neighbours can expect to be re-housed by the end of the year. Whilst much still needs to be done to rebuild these areas following the tsunami, there was also optimism that the devastation and scale of the destruction would bring the country closer together; but this has sadly become another squandered opportunity.

PART I: 'NO WAR, NO PEACE'

Chapter 2

Contextualising war

Throughout the densely populated northern Jaffna peninsula, live the survivors of a long and protracted war waged between the Tamil insurgents demanding sovereignty from the south, and the Sri Lankan government who are attempting to reassert both their power and the unity of the nation state. The ceasefire agreement has been looking increasingly fragile since the withdrawal of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from peace talks in April 2003, since when they and the government have moved from one crisis to the next. There have been a series of major upheavals and contraventions of the 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MoU), which regularly threatens to undermine the ceasefire; the Government and the LTTE at present, communicate through the Norwegian peace brokers. There is discord within the country's ruling parties – a coalition of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), dissolved and was then re-united in November 2005 following Presidential elections that saw a political hard-liner brought to power. There have been disagreements and alliances between most of the major parties at one time or another, including the newly formed Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) of politicised Buddhist clergy, wishing to reassert the authority of the Sinhala language and Buddhism as the state religion. Added to this turbulence, the surprise defection of a leading eastern LTTE cadre has undermined the hitherto solid power base of the LTTE, fighting under the banner of a united northern and eastern Tamil 'homeland'. The Norwegian truce monitors are under increasing pressure and suspicion of favouring the rebels; a view articulated most forcefully through the JVP. This has resulted in a state of ongoing, low level violence, with daily assassinations in the east and north and in the capital, Colombo. Some are now fearful of an eventual resumption of hostilities, unless these internal conflicts can be resolved and negotiations resume.

Preparations for such a resumption of hostilities seems to be occurring within a programme of chauvinist politics from the south and nationalist discourses from the insurgents in the north: the civilian population meanwhile, waiting in trepidation the outcome of these political machinations. Within this tense atmosphere, they must reconcile themselves not only with a bloody and brutalising past, but also deal with the uncertainties of the present and the future.

Attempts at re-establishing normality in the face of ongoing conflict is fraught with political complexity and social tensions that are, according to some as traumatic as the experience of war itself. The repercussions of the war have diminished the country considerably, but the process of rebuilding lives and communities and resuming some form of normality is being attempted, despite widespread suffering. However, recovery and reconciliation with the past is yet to come. Among the Tamils living in the north, this process would involve the total re-establishment of their society and adjustment to profound losses incurred over many years. Uncertainty, fear, mistrust and violence became a part of regular life in this relatively small, densely populated region, something to be lived through on a daily basis. The population learnt how to survive and sustain themselves in the face of enormous fear and threat, employing diverse strategies for dealing with the every day horrors of a war that lasted more than twenty-five years and who now have to continue doing so in an atmosphere that, whilst no longer actively one of war, is still not one of peace, but rather the absence of open warfare.

Silence has become an all-pervasive response to questions that seek to reach beyond the most superficial aspects of life experiences. It permeates all sectors of the community, even extending beyond the more obviously predicted suspicions concerning the foreign community, to encompass the population as a whole: amongst colleagues, friends and even within families. I wanted to establish the quality or nature of this silence: was it a form of resistance or protest? Or a response to 'trauma' – were the events of the war too difficult to articulate in any coherent form that could possibly be understood by the outside world? Scarry (1985) has described the inadequacy of language in the face of torture; was this a kind of collective torture that had silenced an entire community, and made their experiences incommunicable? Was it a *silencing*, through fears of opposition

and subsequent reprisal? Or were people in fact, talking and confiding in each other out of earshot of myself: the 'outsider', the anthropologist researcher?

They were naturally enough, difficult questions to ask, let alone find answers to. In answering the last question first, it is presumptive to assume that I could or would have access to every detail of the lives of all those I encountered. As someone from another socio-cultural setting that was held in some mistrust, and with no direct experience of the conflict my responses would always be inadequate in this regard. Therefore, to take a reflexive stance and acknowledge degrees of subjectivity and limitation was important. Over time I was able to establish relationships built on a certain degree of trust, but always within these accepted boundaries of limitation. In one way, the 'outsider' perspective, despite its connotation of imperialist endeavour, has enabled me on occasion to step outside or at least be less affected, by the tense atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion acquired during the war and that still pervades many Tamil lives.

However, an unexpected fall-out from British colonialism was the ambivalence I encountered towards myself as its modern representative. On the one hand, its negative impact on the social, political and cultural life of the inhabitants of Sri Lanka (examined in more depth later) is clearly understood by many, on the other I encountered an occasional residual deference towards my status as 'British academic'. As mentioned, I would frequently find myself brought to front stage events on the strength of this position alone, with no other relevance or eminence in relation to the proceedings. I was also sometimes accused of being with the CIA, or some other international or government spy network, but never MI5. As though there was some taboo or denial of the possibility that the British colonists, who it could be argued were generally more favourably predisposed towards the Tamils in respect of their reputation as hard working, would ever be involved in such subterfuge.

Pre-eminence is still given to the English language and education system based on its pre-war standards, despite efforts to dissolve this privileging by the LTTE, and current fears and suspicions concerning imported western socio-cultural forms and values; ambivalence remains. This ambivalence: eminence or deception, were on such occasions of course, frustrating although understandable and I would therefore surmise a significant element in the silence. It failed however, to provide a complete explanation.

The other reasons for this silence: trauma/protest/fear, all applied to some extent. Perhaps 'trauma' is the more obvious argument here; of course people have been deeply affected by their experiences, but many are reluctant or unwilling to talk about them, preferring to rebuild and re-establish their lives in concrete, physical and structural ways. When asked, one individual emphatically stated that people wished to think about the future and how to rebuild their lives. Methods of articulating horrendous events is always difficult in the extreme, but especially so in a conflict with few constructive results and much to feel resentful about for the Tamils – very few have benefited from the last two or more decades of war, most can only look back at enormous loss and little in the way of positive change. How therefore, is one to look at the past and recognise anything other than futility and defeat: what can there be to learn from such experiences? How to articulate the resentment and anger of so many lives diminished and frequently cut short? Is it not better to draw a line under the past and reconsider the future with the hope that it may improve?

When bureaucratic inactivity or resistance blocked specific and concrete progress, some were hostile towards the offer of counselling (currently endorsed and promoted by many of the international aid organisations). Their silence seemed both resistive and a natural consequence of the perceived futility of talking about the past. Although these intense emotions surely need some outlet or mode of expression, there are also other factors involved and the 'trauma' paradigm is inadequate in fully understanding the depth of this silence.

Non-violent, passive protest is a familiar strategy in many war situations, including in Sri Lanka that has a history of both sit down, and hunger strikes: such acts are socially and culturally sanctioned methods of registering dissent, but have often proven unrecognised or unsuccessful in the past. The Sri Lankan government had ignored the previous sit down protests of Tamil politicians and hunger strikers had died with little impact on political process or the cessation of hostilities. Public protest has had repercussions of violence towards the Tamils, and to some extent necessitated their silence. Anger has been driven underground and become more subversive – demonstrated through recurrent acts of violence aimed both towards the self through increased rates of suicide, and outwardly

towards the community through small but barely suppressed outbursts of anger, clearly revealing the despair and rage normally concealed beneath the surface.

Among the youth population this has found an even more hostile avenue of expression with the increase in street gangs whose violent acts are perpetrated both towards each other and the community at large. This has gone largely unchecked due to the severe disruption to community and village life, with very little monitoring or recourse to law. However, it is not my intention to catalogue the incidents and misdemeanours of this group but rather to attempt an explanation and generate some understanding of how this behaviour has arisen and what message may be conveyed within it.

Most Tamil males of the younger generation have been confronted perhaps more than anyone with the extremities of violence and war: held under suspicion and threat from all sides, involved in extreme acts of violence themselves, many are now displaying the effects of this brutality within the uneasy context of the ceasefire. It is now well established that people who have been subjected to extreme brutality come to respond and counteract it utilising the same methods; the violence that has surrounded these younger Tamils has been so all pervasive that it must be difficult to comprehend a way of existing that does not involve recourse to further acts of hostility; especially when there is no clear channel for these complex emotions once the 'permission' to fight is over. This is compounded by an overall lack of success in re-establishing socio-economic progress in jobs, education, and opportunities outside the north. This underlying brutalisation and frustration seems to have both turned inwards towards the self and outwards towards society. A society that was unable to protect and spare so many of its members from atrocity is now unable to provide sufficient social and economic advancement. Ways of articulating distress seem to have been found that transmit a message that does not rest on the contentiousness of words.

Local geographies

From the air, the large stepping-stones of the Palk Strait can clearly be seen, barely hidden beneath the surface of the water, separating the north of Sri Lanka from the south-

eastern tip of India, at Rameshwaram. The vast and densely forested area known as the Vanni is also visible thousands of feet below, forming a natural barrier between the far north and the south of the country. Beyond the Vanni lies the flat, open vista of the northern peninsula with its huge glittering lagoons spilling into the Indian Ocean, dotted with palm groves and neat patches of cultivated soil. Within the army occupied High Security Zones (HSZ) the invading wilderness has all but taken over. The northern peninsula forms a virtual island from the rest of the country, attached by a thin strip of land at 'Elephant Pass': site of many battles between the government troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or Tamil Tigers), who control and inhabit the scrub jungle of the Vanni. It still bears the scars of its legendary battles: a rusty tank, expended bomb shells, barbed wire and broken bridges and rows of red signs warning of the danger of unexploded ordnance (UXO). In the descent towards the military air base at Palali, the number of villas and other buildings destroyed and decaying becomes discernible; it appears as though the only buildings intact are those belonging to the numerous INGOs, whose prominent lettering on the rooftops, declare themselves as safety zones, but in fact there are signs of rebuilding and restoration – the new library gleams white and the large Kanthaswamy temple on the outskirts of Jaffna, is clearly visible below.

Geographically, the peninsula is only three metres above sea level, lying in what is described as the 'Dry Zone'. This is contradicted by its covering of dense, green foliage of trees and shrubs; the extensive lushness and abundant greenery of its palmyra, plantain and coconut groves, interspersed with the neat and orderly fields of paddy, tobacco, onions, beetroot, chillies, gourds, and brinjal in the cleared areas. These have been intensely irrigated and industriously cultivated over time, supplied by an extensive network of underground artesian wells. The sparse groves of tall, majestic palmyras – unique to the north, are scattered throughout but the absence of their crowning foliage – destroyed through rocket fire or deliberately removed as part of a clearance operation by the army, is immediately noticeable. This leaves the spare, topless trunks pointing starkly up towards the open sky. The north is renowned for its success in agriculture despite the relatively harsh climate and is never short of water – most properties having their own deep artesian well or at least access to one at a relatively close distance. To the south of

the peninsula lie extensive, low lying, salt water lagoons bordering the main town of Jaffna and surrounding some of the islands. Throughout the peninsula both fishing and agriculture are the main occupations of the inhabitants, unchanged over the centuries. The palmyra tree has a multitude of applications and uses: fire, food, drink (toddy alcohol and the *nonku* fruit juice), fencing, roofing, utensils for cooking and domestic use around the home. The Tamils have an oft quoted reputation for being a self-sufficient and autonomous people in terms of their survival in fairly inhospitable terrain.

The peninsula stretches across an area of approximately 1,262 sq miles. It is 40 miles east to west and between 4-18 miles north to south (see map). To the immediate west lies a group of islands at one time densely populated, called *Nainentivu*, *Punkudutivu*, *Nedunthivu*, *Karanaigativu*; these are now occupied, like the rest of the peninsula by the government troops and inhabited by mostly internally displaced people (IDPs), as well as a few returnees from other parts of the peninsula, the south, and India. There is extensive damage to these areas and thousands of land mines, but also some rebuilding work, most notably to the irrigation networks, individual homes and temples are in progress. As noted, due to the harsh climatic conditions, the Tamils have worked hard to develop a complex and highly effective system of irrigation and farming, and despite the destruction to the wells and the presence of the High Security Zones (HSZs); farming, fishing and the rebuilding of the local infrastructure are taking place to a limited degree.

An island fortress: militarisation and zones of insecurity

All visitors travelling by air to the north are escorted from the military air base at Palali, through the High Security Zone on the hour-long journey to the centre of Jaffna. Passing decaying villas and houses that have become overgrown with vegetation and are sinking rapidly back into the landscape; many are now occupied by military troops. Their battalion numbers are painted on the walls; a few desultory, aimless soldiers sit and wait while others can be seen going about their daily routines of work and leisure: doing laundry, washing and cleaning teeth, playing football, and digging trenches. Driving through the HSZs, it is possible to see how these once beautiful villas set in large plots of

land owned by formerly affluent agriculturalist families and wealthy businessmen, now lie in ruins overgrown with lush, dense forest and jungle undergrowth. Many of these buildings are now nearly derelict, the soldiers have constructed make-shift roofing, washing and sleeping areas in the neglected, battle scarred buildings, pock marked with shell and mortar holes, the roofs and walls in a state of collapse, being engulfed by the encroaching undergrowth. The inhabitants long departed, the villages empty and derelict, apart from their newer army occupants.

In the town itself, makeshift army camps lie close to the roads, surrounded with barbed wire, torn sheets and broken, rusting corrugated iron fences, strings of khaki laundry hanging out to dry and the commonly sighted warnings about trespassing being met with the reassurance that “the minimum of force” will be applied. Here, many of the houses inhabited by displaced families, have also fallen into a state of disrepair; their owners having fled abroad maintenance is often neglected due to economic constraints, fears of further displacements or lack of motivation due to exhaustion and the pointlessness of renovating the home of someone who may return to reclaim their property at any time. The centre of Jaffna however, gives an impression of industriousness: a bustling and ramshackle place with a market and myriad shops and ‘hotels’ (small eating places). These shops are narrow with deep, dark, cool interiors where every space is used to display goods: hanging strips of small packets of washing powder, a glass cabinet with fresh loaves of white bread, shelves crammed with milk powder, soaps, hair shampoos, oils and biscuits. On the floor sacks of lentils, chillies, and uncooked rice; bunches of bananas in varying stages of ripeness hang down and trays of vegetables are spread out in front; space is minimal, service prompt and browsing not customary. Military vehicles crammed with armed, uniformed soldiers vie for road space with the myriad bicycles, motorbikes, trishaws and a unique collection of ancient, but carefully maintained cars from the 1950s and 1960s: Morris Oxfords and Minors, many of which were run on kerosene oil when petrol was unavailable during the war. Picture signboards in Tamil, Sinhala and English warn of the risk of landmines and struggle to find space among advertisements for dental, optical, funeral services as well as pictures of famous Tamil movie stars from South India pasted over old, peeling LTTE posters for ‘*Maavirar Naal*’ (Heroes Day) and ‘*Karumpulikal Naal*’ (Black Tigers Day). Despite the road being

pocked with bomb craters in places, people manage to manoeuvre around them; the same with the buildings housing shops and businesses; many have extensive damage but continue to operate despite the absence of a roof or section of wall. Multifarious images of Hindu deities all painted in brightly fluorescent colours adorn shop fronts everywhere: playful baby Krishna, the elephant God Pillaiyar and his broken tusk, fearsome Kali or benign Parvati, and the mystical mendicant, Siva. Each Hindu proprietor performs a *puja* on opening his shop in the morning, and the smell of incense hangs heavily in the sultry air.

The effects of the war on the region in terms of its access to housing, fishing and agriculture have been and remain, contentious. The cost to the human population is greater still. The peninsula continues to be under army occupation and much of the previously inhabited and farmed land (approximately 15%) lies in the High Security Zones (HSZ) now inhabited solely by the occupying forces of the SLA. All of the inhabitants of these zones have been forced to leave their homes and lands, which remain inaccessible despite the cease-fire. This has built up considerable resentment amongst the general population; many of whom live almost within sight of their properties, but continue to be housed in refugee camps or rental properties owned by exiled Tamils. There is little incentive to renovate and repair these properties, many families have been moved around - some on multiple occasions, and there are fears of being displaced again. Many exiled Tamils have also had their homes commandeered by the LTTE, who have established bases in most villages from which they continue to operate, despite certain restrictions and parameters imposed under the cease-fire agreement. Both communities: military and civilian, live in parallel with each other maintaining minimal contact but some measure of civility. However, anger lies barely concealed and when conflict arises, situations can become explosive: crowds gather and anger spews onto the streets often with apparent trivial, superficial incitement. On several occasions army soldiers have become involved in accidents or incidents that have resulted in street riots; but even minor conflicts can lead to volatile arguments disproving the appearance of normality in every day life in the north. The reminders of war and the continuing presence of the military make it difficult for the population to forget or come to terms with the past: the army checkpoints at every cross roads are still manned by armed soldiers, barbed wire

scars the landscape and the warning signs of land mines are omnipresent. The old Dutch fort; the largest in South Asia, stands derelict and under army occupation; entry and exit to the islands is also patrolled by soldiers checking ID cards.

There have been three previous unsuccessful cease-fires and little concrete changes have taken place to reassure the populace in general, both north and south, that progress is being made. Following the 9/11 events in the U.S and the subsequent call for an end to acts of terrorism and violence, there was renewed interest in restarting peace talks between the government and the LTTE, but latterly there has been an increase in acts of violence provoked by political instability and insurgent defections, to the extent that some talk of a covert or 'shadow' war now being fought. This rapid increase in assassinations and attacks against political and civilian targets comes from all sides, extending to figures in the media. The assassinations of the foreign minister, a well-known and respected journalist, and likewise a popular news-broadcaster and her husband, all ethnic Tamils, add to the feeling of uncertainty. Shooting and grenade attacks are becoming commonplace and it is difficult to know where truth lies among the accusations and counter-accusations.

The conflict has had many different phases and involved different political groups at different times, it has also reached outside its borders to countries that have been sought as places of refuge for exiled Sri Lankans, such as southern India, Europe, Saudi Arabia and Canada. There are incidents of both individual and gang violence among the Tamil Diaspora, usually related to political and caste differences; some have lead to the death of members of these exile communities: safety abroad is compromised as it is in Sri Lanka. Other outside interference has also undoubtedly played its part with various security groups and intelligence organisations, serving politicians both internally and externally in the furtherance of their political and business aims and interests.

Trips away were an opportunity to leave behind the claustrophobic, and at times tense, atmosphere of life on the peninsula. They also acted as a trigger for reminiscence concerning past experiences - both during and pre-war, especially for those making their first trip 'outside' in years. These excursions were also a reminder of the restrictions placed on Tamils wishing to move around their own country; including the various checkpoints, time-consuming and tiring journeys that required considerable patience. The

frustrations these trips imposed brought back recollections of checkpoints during the war that had to be negotiated on a daily basis and were both humiliating and degrading.

Travelling through Elephant Pass, just before the first series of checkpoints, the flat treeless landscape is a graveyard of broken and twisted barbed wire; an abandoned army tank and exploded and unexploded bombs and other debris litter the sandy ground and salty lagoons. Small parties of de-mining personnel toil in the humid air wearing helmets as their only protection, slowly scraping away the soil with small hand tools; a laborious and dangerous task. A small section of ground is squared off with wooden pegs and string, a red flag with a skull and cross-bones on it warning of the dangers of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) - of no help to the animal population who are frequent and unwitting victims of the landmines. Hand tools, metal detectors and large diggers that can withstand the mine blast, are used. There are still thousands of mines and UXO throughout the north, maps marking their location are produced regularly, but the task is made difficult by the changing landmarks (trees or buildings used as markers have been bombed or destroyed) and in many cases the total absence of any landmarks at all. Often army landmines are removed by the Tamil Tigers, relocated and then reused to blow up the army. The Tsunami waves have now washed away many more from their original location. Many people have lost limbs due to mines: 4,464 people since 1987 (Jaipur Limb Centre statistics, 2004).

The A9 is the only land route out of the north, traversing the area from Jaffna to Vavuniya; the border town between LTTE controlled territory and the south and east. The journey is punctuated by a series of four checkpoints monitored by both the SLA and the LTTE forces: one at Palai on leaving the army controlled areas and another before entering the LTTE controlled Vanni region, and again twice at Omanthai after leaving the LTTE region and before re-entering the government controlled south. These four separate inspections must be navigated with checks to vehicles, baggage and passengers. Trucks piled high with goods – commercial and personal, being transported in either direction now the A9 is open - queue to have all their contents unloaded, checked, and taxes paid in the case of the LTTE, before being allowed to move on; this takes place from early in the morning until about 7.00pm when the peninsula is effectively cut off during the night hours. All passengers must pass through and have their passes, ID cards and baggage

searched; the LTTE also check the passes of all foreigners, including returning Tamils and answer questions about the purpose of the journey before making a payment “in support of the Tamil cause”, as I was told. Travelling through the LTTE controlled Vanni and the main political, legal and administrative centre at Kilinochchi provides a microcosmic view of how the north would look if the Tamil Tigers were in full control of the north and east. The contrasts between the two areas are marked: there is an evident orderliness to the town, with the recently formed LTTE police monitoring every junction, and occasionally uniformed male and female Tiger cadres on their motorbikes. Buildings are clearly signed and their purpose inscribed alongside the ubiquitous Tamil Tiger insignia. New and shiny corrugated iron fencing surrounds the most significant buildings: such as the Political Headquarters and various projects and institutes that demonstrate their efforts regarding the welfare of women, children, the unemployed and health care. They have their own banks and have opened a restaurant serving good Tamil food in air conditioned rooms; unaffordable for most Tamils and mainly one suspects, for visitors and the international aid community who reside in segregated living quarters, with no opportunity and no encouragement to mix with the locals: there is much less evidence of the INGO logos here, in contrast to Jaffna.

At the halfway stage of the journey through the Vanni, all buses and transport stops at a small village with a renowned Pillaiyar temple situated at the roadside, which provides protection for travellers. Outside it there is a continuous stream of devotees, shoes removed, genuflecting three times whilst grasping the earlobes: *thoppukkaranam* – an act of universal homage to the God who is the remover of obstacles and known by various names: Pillaiyar, Ganesha, Ganapaty, Vinayaka or Vigneshwara. Camphor and incense burn permanently, blanketing the entire village in its aroma; the broken husks of the coconuts litter the ground. Colourfully painted and decorated wooden lorries, buses and a few ancient cars park for the few minutes it takes to show devotion, buy mangoes (considered to be the best in the country) and nuts before the bus blasts its horn, warning passengers of its impending departure. The air is permanently filled with the sound of revving engines, blowing horns, bustling crowds and hawkers selling their wares. Everyone re-entering the bus is now laden down with fruit, groundnuts whose shells will soon litter the floor of the bus, and their foreheads are freshly adorned with yellow

cantanam (sandal paste) and *vibuthi* (holy ash). On leaving the Vanni, a second round of LTTE and SLA checkpoints must be negotiated; including checks beneath all vans, cars and trucks and passengers frisked by smiling but insolent SLA girls; including enquiries as to why I wish to spend my time in the north and, “do you like Sinhala peoples too?”. In contrast the LTTE cadres are polite, but unsmiling and uneasy when I wander off alone to find the toilets. They speak little English and disapprove of its predominance over other languages – support for the Tigers does not show itself in a proficiency in the English language; they are pleased, although slightly suspicious of foreigners speaking Tamil.

As the months go by, journeys south have become more aggravating for those now used to the novelty of travel and there are reports of accidents as drivers avoid taking rests in order to make as much money as they can; there are also tales of scams operating on buses, making the trip even less pleasant. On one journey, an elderly passenger clearly fed up and insulted at having to alight at each check point to show his documents to military personnel, refused to get off, claiming: “If I collapse, you people will be responsible for me – it’s an abuse of Human Rights!” He was allowed to remain on the bus: a rare example of successful protest. A rumour was also circulating that there was a dangerous scam being perpetrated on the buses to Colombo: a man chats to a fellow passenger, establishes whether he is affluent or not, offers him tea which is drugged, and when the unwitting passenger has passed out - accused of being drunk, the thief in a pretence of helping him steals all his possessions. A rather bizarre consequence was that three men who witnessed and reported this event were themselves accused of being in the LTTE, because of their ‘cleverness’ in discerning the ruse! This of course, may also have been a rumour that served to keep travelers from conversing.

Once past the last checkpoint the atmosphere and the roads change: in the south they are well paved and smooth. The white dome of the Buddhist *Dagoba* replaces the colourful Hindu *Gopuram*, the signs outside the shops change from the angular Tamil to the round and curly Sinhala script and the style of dress – especially of the women, changes; the sari of the Sinhala woman is worn with a small frill at the waistband, and the *pottu* (a red or brown dot to signify female marital status) and *Thaali* (gold chain worn by married

Tamil women) are absent; western influences of style are more noticeable in the larger towns. There are curious stares towards the bus, its Tamil markings singling it out.

When travelling with a group of Tamils to Colombo, some of whom were making their first visit in many years and others their first trip ever, memories were evoked of life in the southern capital during the war. Walking the streets and seeing particular landmarks elicited recollections of previous negative experiences for some of these travellers: their recollections made more intense by a prolonged absence. Reminders of their perceived contentious identity were brought home more clearly in the capital - something perhaps easier to forget, living in the homogenous north. We were told to 'move on' when we arrived after dark in the capital because of concerns from the local residents who had seen a bus load of Tamils and thought it was suspicious, and again on our return when, following a burst tyre, a drunken off-duty policeman thought the bus contained Tamil insurgents. Generally, most Tamils continue to feel more comfortable in the Tamil areas of the city: shopping and eating in familiar stores and 'hotels'. Some spoke about how easy it is to be identified as a Tamil in the south because of language, clothing, hairstyle, and even skin colour was mentioned, as well as adornments such as the *Thaali* and *pottu*. They spoke of the constant expectation of being either arrested or having IDs checked when moving around the city; having to get permission from the police if Tamil visitors wished to come and stay, then the frustration of being sent away and told to return the following day, repeated for weeks until finally permission was refused. Displays of authority and control were a constant reminder of the powerlessness of being a civilian from a minority. Some learnt to deny and repress their 'Tamil-ness'; rubbing out the *pottu* before leaving the house; not speaking openly in public, shrinking and diminishing their bodies to become invisible and unnoticed.

Travelling to the north-east from Vavuniya, the roads remain poor but there are hills, vast tracts of forest and jungle with the occasional small settlement obscured by the dense foliage; and for the fortunate a herd of elephants seen moving slowly through the trees - said to be a lucky sighting. Travelling to Tirukkonamalai, a journey that before the war took two or three hours now takes about twelve, across rough, unmade and potholed roads, the van lurching and swerving, heads banging off the roof of the van, giving rise to fits of giggling as everyone is thrown around inside. Despite this jocularly, little contact

or conversation is established among the passengers outside the immediate group of friends or relatives.

The towns of the east are more heterogeneous: Tamils, Sinhalese and Tamil speaking Muslims live in more equal numbers in the northeast, which has lead to its own set of difficulties with regular *hartal*(s) (strikes) in protest at social or political infringements, although the fact that this occurs at all is perhaps a positive sign. Levels of militarisation were less obvious – there were no manned checkpoints and the army presence was mostly within the army base with less patrolling of the streets. In recent months this has changed; increasing levels of violence between the army, the LTTE and Muralitharan, alias Karuna, a break-away faction operating in the east, have lead to frequent assassinations and therefore greater degrees of militarisation.

Far from being a protective force, the army were seen as occupiers. Women complained of harassment; they were accused of subverting the Tamil youths by initiating them and providing them with access to pornography and alcohol, and they were unable to maintain law and order. They were also acknowledged by some to be isolated, cut off from their families, living in appalling conditions and notoriously underpaid.

A community under siege

There have been innumerable and profound losses throughout the country of Sri Lanka. One of the few insider accounts dates from the period of India's intervention in the late 1980s, when the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) became involved in attempts to mediate between the government and LTTE. During this episode a group of writers from Jaffna University, who later became the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), provided a more personal perspective on the local consequences of the conflict (Hoole et al. 1990; Somasundaram 1998). They give a graphic and moving portrayal of not only the political and military campaigns in the north, but also a glimpse of life on the peninsula and the ensuing devastation wrought on an already traumatised region. It is useful to highlight aspects of this work, in order to explain some of the current issues – particularly how a community learns to become silent.

When the Indian peace keeping forces arrived in the north, at the behest of the government and the agreement of the LTTE to help implement the Peace Accord (1987), the civilian population greeted them as saviours, hoping they would provide the safety and security that had been absent for so many years. On their arrival by sea to the northern and eastern ports the populace were out in force to greet them, some kneeling to touch their feet in the hope of rescue from the brutality of the fighting; others weeping with relief. However after some months, the reality proved somewhat different. Initially, relations were cordial and the soldiers were friendly, helpful and this was reciprocated among the civilians in the north - in the south there were riots at the IPKF's arrival in an atmosphere of increasing militancy from the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP). Soon however, there was criticism among the Tamil Tigers that their interests had been betrayed by the Indian government in league they felt, with the Sri Lankan government. It was claimed that the Sri Lankan government had agreed, in exchange for India's support in de-arming the Tigers, to deny anyone perceived as antagonistic towards India access to the vast, natural harbour at Tirukkonamalai. The Sri Lankan government began to put pressure on the Indian forces to take a harder line with the various militant groups quarrelling in the north, each vying for supremacy. Locally, the IPKF were increasingly criticised for their inability to maintain law and order in Jaffna seeming only interested in re-taking arms from among some of the militant groups. Rapidly there was an escalation of anger among the Tamils towards the IPKF and the Ceylon (as they were then known) police as incidents of violence increased towards civilians. The Tigers encouraged this and fuelled civil protests against the Indian troops, who became seen as aggressors, rather than saviours - despite progress having been made in other aspects of the peace accord. Increasing incidences of brutality towards the civilian population brought with it the realisation that their presence was now nothing to do with peace-keeping. This became one of the worst periods in the history of the conflict from the point of view of the Tamils. They were now trapped between the SLA, IPKF and the various militant factions, operating and fighting between each other to gain the upper hand. It has to be remembered that the Jaffna peninsula is a relatively small, densely populated region wherein the people found themselves living in the midst of ferocious battles on a prolonged and daily basis. The IPKF presence on the peninsula lasted just under two

years (October 1987-September 1989), but it created irreparable damage to Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil relations, leaving trust in their supportive, protective and powerful ally across the Palk Strait, sadly eroded.

Throughout the war the main Murugan temple unlike many others, remained untouched by the bombing and provided a safe haven for those living in fear of the night raids; as many as 40,000 people sought shelter there during the height of the fighting between the IPKF and the LTTE (Somasundaram, 1998). Each night families and communities would go to the temple, tolerating squalid conditions with little alternative and return to their homes during the day if it was safe, in an attempt to build a semblance of normality with work and school. The temple also remained open during the mass exodus of 1995 and the yearly festival went ahead throughout the conflict, albeit with reduced numbers and less pageantry. Thousands of other temples and churches were damaged and destroyed during the war; remnants of the red and white walls of once thriving village temples are a common sight throughout the peninsula.

One such bombing raid destroyed a large Anglican church - St. James', in which scores of Tamils died one night when the roof collapsed on the terrified refugees sheltering below. The high roofs were dangerous and their collapse was more devastating and destructive to those seeking protection beneath, than houses or buildings with more than one level. One Catholic woman said that she and her family would not seek shelter in the church because of this, stating that; "priests are not God; they are like us, they cannot save us". Other religious seminaries were also targeted or taken over by the army and, in the process, destroyed: an 82 year old Catholic nun described how she and her fellow nuns were forced to leave their home and find refuge in the Vanni – the vast jungle area was rife with malaria, dengue, militants, malnutrition and poor sanitation. They were moved around frequently during this time and only returned to their home after two years. Similarly, a local seminary of Catholic priests was also destroyed following occupation by the SLA and an intense period of bombing which followed: the fathers had been displaced with three hours notice to leave and were prevented from returning for a year and a half. On their return they found the seminary destroyed, including books and artefacts most of which were missing or had been stuffed into toilets. They had to seek alternative, temporary accommodation before restoration could take place, and spent the

interim years moving around before finding a permanent home.

This was typical of several institutions including the main hospital, which was also displaced to a smaller site at some distance from the main town. The hospital had been targeted during the IPKF time, and staff and patients had lain under siege for many days, during which several were gunned down by the Indian soldiers searching for members of the LTTE (Hoole et al. 1990). Families were displaced some as many as nineteen times, often from one village to the next and sometimes as far away as the Vanni, Colombo or India, usually there was only a matter of a few minutes or an hour's notice to collect a few belongings, bury gold (collected as security to pay, pawn or buy necessities) or other valued possessions and leave.

One woman I spoke to, who had returned to Jaffna to reclaim property, had fled to the UK fifteen years previously with her father, sister and aunt; her mother had died previously during a heart attack, unable to get to the hospital because of the curfew; she also had two brothers already living abroad. Her father used to stay up all night watching for planes that might bomb their home, but one day at noon their house was struck; they had to lie on the floor amidst the ruins all day until nightfall when it was safer to leave. She described the intense heat, how everyone was drenched in sweat, terrified and unable to move. After nightfall they left, each person could only carry a towel, a bottle of water and a small box of food; they then walked miles through the scrub jungle, hearing gunshots all around them, until they reached Vavuniya, some three days later and were able to escape the country. Those who stayed did so because they had nowhere else to go, no money, or as an act of resistance, but many died during these displacements due to exhaustion, dehydration and starvation. Children and the elderly were particularly vulnerable.

Thousands were told to leave by the LTTE some six years later, the fighting having continued unrelentingly. Among the handful who witnessed the mass exodus, they reported seeing people walking so slowly it could take one hour on a journey that would normally take three minutes because of fatigue, sickness and the volume of people weighed down with possessions blocking the streets. One particular bridge on the outskirts of the peninsula collapsed, due to the sheer numbers walking across and scores of people were killed.

A frequent but brief conversation that took place as the peace talks deteriorated, concerned what people would do if the war restarted. Many said this would be the final war, no one I spoke to imagined that they would be able to survive or cope with another outbreak of fighting. All these conversations had a dreadful finality and irrefutability to them: no-one would survive, nothing could save them this time, there would be no cessation of war, no further peace talks and there was “nowhere to go” - politically or physically. One evening I asked a friend what she and her family would do - leave their home or stay? Without a moments’ hesitation, she replied adamantly that they would stay in their home, no matter what. As in previous times when so many were displaced, this family were among the very few to remain, apart that is from one very short period, spent in Colombo in 1995. This brief time of displacement provoked a severe reaction in the mother and she describes feeling completely disorientated and out of place, with great fears for her sister and sick brother, who had remained behind. What she conveyed during this conversation was the magnitude of her emotional, physical and spiritual connection with ‘home’ – *vidu*: this word denotes not only a sense of stability, familiarity and strength but also implies an extension of the self; living, rooted and historical. To be wrenched away from this was intensely destabilising and painful – more so in fact, than the falling bombs. To be driven from home was a severe shock for all Tamils, as was finding themselves in the midst of full-scale, pitched battles, completing their sense of terror, bewilderment and loss. As stated, during the mass exodus the LTTE told the population in Jaffna to leave the peninsula or they would be killed or raped by the SLA. Some feel they were misled and that those who went to the Vanni were used as human shields, giving the cadres time and space to manoeuvre or escape. The local population who remained behind were faced with accusations of collaboration and of hiding LTTE cadres, which lead to mass arrests, disappearances and in many cases, death. Some chose to return to Jaffna, despite having been told that their houses were all destroyed – but some found their homes intact.

The ambivalence of the LTTE towards the middle classes and high caste Jaffna citizens is well known; the perception being that they are not sufficiently committed to the cause and would rather send their sons and daughters to safety in exile. But, it also presented the Jaffna Tamils with a dilemma, as I was often told: “Who else is there? Who else is

fighting for Tamil rights?” because undoubtedly whatever was felt about the militants, the Sri Lankan government is not considered a protector of Tamil rights or Tamil people. There were hopes in the newly formed Tamil National Alliance (TNA), consisting of a group of eleven elected members of parliament, but so far they have been unable to offer an alternative or independent voice for the Tamil people, and are said to have little influence among the southern political elite.

Education is still high on the agenda of many young people who prefer to work towards higher education abroad or in the south; although many are publicly supportive of the LTTE (also referred to as *iyakkam*: ‘the movement’) they are reluctant to join up. This situation is changing however, with the loss of so many middle-class Tamils abroad, more students are enrolling in colleges and at the university from across the social and caste spectrum. Some are also members of the movement and view their activities in politics as equal to, if not more important than their studies.

The losses of war

In 1983 the Jaffna peninsula contained 42% of the entire Tamil population of Sri Lanka, the rest were located in the east, Colombo, the hill country and a few in the north west. 95% of the resident population living on the peninsula were Sri Lankan Tamils. The Jaffna peninsula was, and still is the most homogenised region in terms of Tamil inhabitants; in contrast, Tirukkonamalai in the east of Sri Lanka has approximately equal numbers of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims: 33.6% Sinhalese, 33.8% Tamils, and 29% Muslims. According to the National Peace Council (2003) approximately 65,000 people have been killed, at least half of these from the civilian population and there are approximately 1.2 million displaced people in and outside of Sri Lanka from a total population of 18.5 million. It is unknown how many were “involuntarily disappeared” or injured. An enormous percentage of both the losses in death, disappearance and into exile are from among the youth population. The government forces have approximately 225,000 members comprising army, navy, air force and police. The LTTE by contrast, has between 2,000 and 10,000 cadres (M.R Gamburd, 2004). Estimates put the number of

deaths during the war among the LTTE at 17,648, and among the SLA at 14,790 (National Peace Council 2003). Out of a total loss of 65,000 dead over the duration of the war, this means that among the civilian population an estimated 32,438 have died. This figure continues to rise despite the cease-fire agreement. On the Jaffna peninsula alone there are 18,000 widows. Whilst these figures provide a statistical account of the losses, the overall effect of the war is more difficult to grasp in its human costs. The dispersal of communities into refugee camps, families and neighbours fleeing into exile abroad, young people joining the LTTE and of the untold deaths and countless disappearances. Repeated bombing raids from air, sea and land using multi-barrelled rocket launchers salvaged from the Russians, have destroyed whole communities, families ripped apart and scattered throughout the globe with perhaps as little as one remaining member left behind.

Many expected the war to continue indefinitely, Trawick (2002:) described the hopelessness felt by many, as recently as December 2001: "They could go on like this forever. They will go on for a while, I think.....the damage will be permanent and irreparable. There will be no redemption. There will be no purification. There will probably not even be any lessons learned" (p. 292). In certain circumstances and settings, redemption and healing seem impossible: the Holocaust of World War II for example (Langer 1997). This undoubtedly depends on the nature of the conflict and the ability of those involved to address some of the issues satisfactorily for themselves. For many Holocaust survivors retribution and redemption were probably impossible in the aftermath of the Second World War, when many camp inmates were forced into permanent exile and those already in exile, remained so with no opportunity for either personal or social restitution. Likewise in Sri Lanka there are few opportunities for reconciliation when within small neighbourhoods, there is uncertainty as to who can and cannot be trusted; relatives remain in exile over decades adjusting to their new lives and generations are being born outside their parents natal village.

There were constant fears of 'cordon-search' operations: day and night raids in which the Sri Lankan military would surround a neighbourhood or village, round up 'suspects' and question all the inhabitants as to the whereabouts of any suspected Tamil militants. Mass arrests were made after which, many were never seen again. Often during these raids a

member of the village would be hooded, as a way of preserving anonymity and ensuring compliance, and then ordered to identify from a line of fellow villagers anyone suspected of connections with the LTTE: these individuals became known as “noddors” (Somasundaram, 1998).

There was loss of health due to increased poverty, limited or no access to health care facilities, and overcrowding. Sicknesses were left untreated because of inadequate health care provisions resulting from the destruction of hospitals and the enforced exile of doctors and other health care workers (Somasundaram 1998). The curfew often prevented the sick from reaching hospitals and many subsequently died. There has been a loss of schooling and further educational opportunities due to frequent displacements and the destruction of schools and universities. Successive waves of Tamils have left, some initially seeking better opportunities in the first world because of discrimination in government policies towards the Tamils in their own country, followed by those fleeing for their lives as the war took an increasingly brutal, destructive and desperate hold. Large tracts of land and beach front have been demarcated as High Security Zones (HSZ) for use by the military, which has led to a loss of traditional employment: fishing and agricultural traders most of whom have fished and farmed in the area for generations, have lost their livelihoods.

There has been a disturbance to ancient religious and cultural practices such as wedding ceremonies, birth and puberty ceremonies and burial rites through the absence and loss of family, neighbours and other upholders of local knowledge and custom. Finally, loss of security, identity and authority have for some people led to a sense of passivity and inertia, as well as anger, which has deeply affected the community in what has been termed a “collective trauma” (Somasundaram 1998:154). Hoole et al. (1990) have extensively described the destruction to both economy and local institutions during the IPKF period in Jaffna’s history. In the interim period, very little has been rebuilt despite three cease-fires, and much has been further destroyed: homes, hospitals, colleges, schools, local government buildings, shops, roads and the less visible aspects of the infrastructure that are none-the-less essential. The destruction takes two forms: bomb damage and destruction due to enforced neglect and the onslaught of nature. Through lack of financial support, buildings and roads collapsed as a result of natural growth and

vital repairs were too expensive. The population had to cope without electricity for eight years, petrol for longer, as well as shortages of food at various times over the war years. Great inventiveness and imagination were employed to find food, fuel and develop ways of existing under extreme restrictions but also more detrimentally, many have become familiar with the apparatus of war. Most children can identify guns and other military devices; are familiar with the sounds of war-fare and their school copy books come with printed images of helicopters, battleships and tanks on the cover.

The Ayurvedic and Siddha University Training School, which operates despite massive destruction to its buildings and near total lack of resources including basic materials for teaching and learning, represents the damage found in many institutions. Interruptions to services resulting in power cuts, telecommunications failures, and the closure of land routes created difficulties not only in trade and business but also in getting essential supplies to the north. Work, study, and schooling were interrupted with far reaching repercussions for future opportunities. Jaffna pre-war had a number of large hotels, cinemas and large parks; a testament to its status as a modern, affluent and thriving community, but these are now occupied by the army, lie in broken ruins or are overrun with vegetation.

Despite these deprivations, some institutions managed to remain open, functioning under reduced circumstances: the hospital continued to treat patients wherever possible, at one point relocating when the bombing in Jaffna town was intense; the university continued to teach and train students and the schools remained open most of the time, with essential staff and students. Government offices and shops also continued to do business on a small scale; some forms of local transport operated with restricted services, cars ran on kerosene oil, and bicycles were an important commodity. Some institutions have been rebuilt: the library which came to symbolise so much of the destruction to Jaffna, has been resurrected and is now open, but sadly missing many of its unique and irreplaceable documents, manuscripts and books. The large fish market has been resurrected and there are a few new shops. One of the cinemas has been re-opened and there are regular public music and dance performances. The new law court has been erected, but perhaps most prominent is the rebuilding of many temples and churches, financed mostly by Tamils from abroad. A large number of temples have been extended beyond their original

structure and demonstrate considerable affluence, in often unremarkable and even destroyed villages.

Increased socio-economic opportunities are often held to be the best and most concrete signs of progress in a community attempting to rebuild itself following war. Unfortunately it is in this very sphere that the least progress is being made; there are many promises of opening up trade and financial routes leading to greater prospects for work and trade, but their evidence at ground level is minimal. In Kilinochchi, home and headquarters of the LTTE at the present time, a demonstration of the potential for socio-economic advancement is evident. This draws many Tamils to support the cause and the Tigers position of pre-eminence in questions of authority and progress. This ongoing expansion and development in trade, is unseen in the army controlled northern peninsula. There are restrictions in permissible imports to the region. Anything deemed a risk, for example materials that might be turned into weapons manufacturing is prohibited; this includes anything related to aeronautical/aerodynamic engineering. Training courses in any of these subjects were dropped from the universities' curriculum. Difficulties in upholding the law in the north, has enabled smuggling and illegal trading and trafficking to flourish in various sectors and villages. Some businessmen are thriving both legitimately and illegitimately from the opening of the A9 route south. However, overall losses to the economy are far reaching; some estimates put the loss at Rs 2,451 billion (The National Peace Council, 2003). The government has spent five times more on the war than on education, and three times more than on health. The LTTE are also estimated to have spent approximately Rs 74.55 billion. The typical domestic income in the north and east dropped to half what it was prior to 1983 and contributory factors such as food shortages and lack of proper health care, lead to increases in malnutrition and infant mortality.

The fishing communities have been amongst some of the hardest hit, both during the conflict and in the period of the cease-fire. There have been heavy restrictions placed on the fishermen from the Sri Lankan government in terms of where fishing is permitted and what kind of equipment can be used. The fishermen have been under constant threat of attack when out at sea, or recruitment by the Tamil Tigers as well as more recently invasions into their waters from the fishermen from India who use larger nets and fishing

vessels – there have been frequent reports of fighting and arrests in connection with this. The restrictions, imposed by the government and enforced by the military on the fishermen, require them to operate between 07.00 a.m and 11.00 a.m., (previously, much fishing also took place at night). The distance from the shore that fishing was permitted was also reduced to 500 metres and the type of nets allowed, were also restricted. No sails were permitted on the boats, or fishing beyond a depth of a few feet. Most of these restrictions still apply. There are several low, narrow causeways that connect the mainland peninsula to the islands; they were originally built with a series of tunnels running through them to enable the fishermen to traverse from one lagoon to the next without having to travel the entire length of the causeway, which can be as much as $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. The army has blocked all but one tunnel in each causeway, for security reasons to stop the Sea Tigers^{xii} from breaching the coastline undetected; a watching post is placed at the tunnel juncture. The fishing boats must now sail the length of the causeway before accessing the tunnel at the far end. This has increased the time and distance between leaving shore and reaching fishing waters within the already narrow time strictures. The fishing factories in the north are gone; once a large thriving industry, fishing has been reduced to catching mostly for local consumption to be sold by small, individual traders. The tsunami left the fishing communities further ravaged. Some fishermen have refused to return to the sea; believing the sea gods to be angry and they are fearful of the consequences of further acts of rage. Others have returned to the sea in the newly supplied fibre-glass boats with outboard motors provided by the INGOs, who flooded into the area like a second tsunami wave all along the northern coast. Relief has come at a cost however, and changes have been wrought to ancient fishing practices and in some of the camps resentment has been fuelled between the two refugee communities; those displaced by the war and those by the tsunami. There are also some frustrations among the displaced who regard the INGOs as inflexible in what will and will not be offered, rather than responding to needs outlined by local Tamil groups.

Environmental effects

The wild life is at its most active during the pre-dawn hour; the air is charged with the clamour of dogs, cows, goats and hens, merging with the myriad and raucous tropical birdcalls. The terrain of the northern peninsular being completely flat, it gives the impression that sound carries across wide and vast distances; animals and birds can be heard stirring from far away and bestow an unearthly, echoing quality to the atmosphere - almost as though the peninsula is situated beneath a vast dome. The thick vegetation that despite the dryness of the soil has been industriously cultivated over many centuries in the north has resulted in dense foliage intersected with a labyrinthine maze of lanes and small paths creating a disorientating and rather claustrophobic effect on the newcomer. Houses and villas are hidden behind high walls, many punctuated with bullet holes or gaping craters from artillery shelling.

The beautiful palmyra fences - a series of fan shaped leaves woven together to form a complete screen, cloak the homes behind and provide some protection from the outside. Between some houses there is a small archway cut into the lower section of the partition fence, just big enough for neighbours to stoop through and visit each other, without having to go out onto the open road. At one time there was an archway at the entrance to many homes, under which passers-by could take shelter or rest; these archways have disappeared as trust in outsiders has diminished and suspicion has replaced hospitality towards strangers. These once gracious homes that are either being rebuilt or sliding further into a state of decay from bomb damage, followed by decades of neglect and the rapid onslaught of nature, provide a glimpse of the once affluent lifestyle of the Jaffna Tamils who lived here.

Much of the environment has become compromised due to the protracted fighting which has seen the destruction of the trees and the soil. Landmines have prevented farmers from being able to sow and manage their crops, the high security zones have also prevented people from inhabiting, or farming on their land – an issue that is a huge stumbling block in the negotiations between the Tamils and the government, causing aggravation and frustration for all those who have homes and land in these areas. The soil erosion has also undermined the centuries old farming practices and land maintenance. Ecological

changes wrought on the landscape of the Jaffna peninsula are widespread, (T. Saverimuttu, N. Sriskandarajah, V.I.S Jayapalan, 1999). The characteristic and dominating feature of the Jaffna landscape is the palmyra - often standing at up to 25m; it is dedicated to the God Pillaiyar and consequently considered sacred. There were extensive palmyra groves throughout the peninsula and its islands - at the beginning of the conflict there were an estimated five million palms: these have been decimated^{xiii}.

From the mid-eighties onwards the Tamil militants located their bases in the area south of Jaffna in the Vanni, a large area of scrub jungle and forest. In response the Sri Lankan army carried out a number of raids and later bombing campaigns in this region and the more entrenched the militants became, the greater their effect was on the finely balanced ecology of their new environment. They subsisted entirely from what they could forage from within the Vanni: food, shelter, as well as clearing the ground for training and using local materials to build camps.

The use of heavy explosives in aerial bombing, carpet-bombing, naval cannon and shelling destroyed buildings, vegetation, trees, animals and birds. Destruction to the soil, the wells, the creation of large craters has all affected agricultural productivity. Disease has become more widespread through changes to the ecology: water borne diseases such as Malaria and Dengue fever have increased, as has cholera and typhoid through inadequate sanitation in the refugee camps. Road clearance by the army has been extensive; all the vegetation within a one mile radius from all major roads has been cleared to prevent surprise attacks, the tops of many palmyra trees have been lopped off both from the use of multi-barrel rocket launchers and as clearance to gain sight of the militants in the jungle. The SLA, the militants and the local populace have also extensively cut down the palmyra for a variety of reasons: to sell, to make shelters and bunkers, and to use as fuel. They are slow growing and take about thirty years to reach their full height. Bunkers, fencing, fortifications, clearance of landing strips have all lead to the loss of huge numbers of palms, and this continues unabated. Another exacerbating feature has been the major military offensives that have often taken place at a critical time in the ecological cycle: before harvesting or after sowing.

Recent environmental concerns however, have been addressed by one of the main protagonists in its earlier destruction: the LTTE have made considerable efforts to reverse

some of the negative impact to the ecology of the war. They have encouraged through education the replanting of trees, the control of logging, and a ban on deforestation, which goes some way towards returning the environment to a healthier state. Their produce is grown on uncontaminated soil and has a reputation for freshness and taste, and is sold relatively widely in shops and markets in Jaffna. The environment and its state of health is an essential component of post-war recovery that goes hand in hand with the recovery of the human population - who have always tried to work in harmony with their environment. Unfortunately, the 2004 tsunami has added to the environmental destruction; consequently the soil has much higher levels of salinity now and the well water is in many areas undrinkable. The coastline has altered with some protective coral barriers vanishing and landmines dangerously dislodged.

Chapter 3

Discourses of War

The antecedents for the war that has ruptured the country over the last two decades, has its origins in a complex series of social, political and economic events that reach back into its colonial past. Amongst researchers seeking to identify the root causes of the conflict in Sri Lanka, emphasis has been located across three central domains: the effects of colonialism, the questioning of supposed ancient historical truths, and modernist preoccupations that challenge concepts of the nation state. These interlinked factors; colonisation, historical misrepresentation and nation building, have resulted in the creation and identification of an indigenised 'other' and contributed to the rise of violent militancy as a response to perceived threats of dissonance. The ensuing circular violence has had major consequences on the well-being of the civilian population as a whole and led to the silencing of almost an entire ethnic group. The necessity of expressing this anguish has been taken up by Tamil youths through the transformation of a familiar self-mortification ritual that now includes the desire for a more personal ordeal or challenge. Incidences of postcolonial violence have been linked and identified as a consequence of unresolved conflict stemming from the colonial era. Many studies have suggested that memories of colonial violence, for example the slave trade in Africa have remained inexpressible, but are recalled through other means (Shaw 2002). Shaw asserts that current political violence and the silence amongst the northern Temne inhabitants of Sierra Leone concerning colonial violence, are alluded to through processes of witchcraft and demonic imagery. She notes ambivalence towards modernity and its bi-products of corruption, violence, exchange and consumption, against a backdrop of four centuries of slavery and colonialism in Sierra Leone. This ambivalence is posited within a setting where recollections of the production and trade in humans, is both remembered and then articulated in the face of present-day violence. Images of witches and a 'diabolic diviner' seem to expose 'modernity itself in the image of the witch' (p.266/7). These images and

rituals arise out of fears of colonial modernity - temporally located across continents through the slave trade, and challenge the notion of both 'traditional' practices and ideas of 'modernity' (p. 3). Comaroff and Comaroff (1992) have analysed post-independence social tensions and discord, citing how memories of colonial violence have been transposed into ordinary daily life through objects, images and rituals. It naturally follows in their view, that social change and bodily transformation are indivisible, and any impact on macroprocesses takes place through these microprocesses (p.38) of everyday habitus.

Sri Lanka's ancient history has often been used to subvert the causes of the current conflict away from modern politics and find its roots in ethno-historic mythologies (Tambiah 1986). Several anthropologists have been vocal in endeavouring to reassert the root causes of the conflict away from these ancient claims that seek to identify and apportion blame on long standing disputes between 'ethnic' Sinhalese and Tamils (Obeyesekere, 1984; Spencer, 1990; Tambiah, 1986). It was only with the arrival of the British that aspects of colonialist culture hitherto unknown in Sri Lanka, came to the surface; the most significant of which was religious and class structures; ethnicity became a way of defining and differentiating communities, often using racist idioms related to skin colour and class. These attitudes especially of class, were perceived by the Sinhalese as a valorisation and privileging of the Tamils by the British within economic and educational structures: demographically the Tamils held many of the senior white collar jobs and were leading players in business, politics and education. This questionable preferencing by the British lead to resentment among the Sinhalese and eventually resulted in a number of draconian policies post independence, that denied the Tamils their educational, religious and language rights. In order to assert rights, emphasis on historical truth and the placing of Tamil, Sinhala origins on the island began to be argued in force, despite having been hitherto almost unrecognised as having any significance. It fulfilled a newly discovered need to define identity and exclusivity in a land that was simultaneously experiencing a decline in economic status and rapid increases in population growth. In this chapter and within this tradition, I will explore recent colonial history, which lead to these misrepresentations, as well as the political and socio-economic events that resulted in efforts to establish national and ethnic boundaries that have segregated this once relatively harmonious island. These have created a context in

which diversity and difference has become disputed rather than embraced, and where violence and the brutality of war have come to shape the experiences of Sri Lanka's youth.

Colonialism: creating the context for war

It was with the arrival of the British in 1815 that the more far reaching effects of colonialism were felt on the island, through its long-term impact on political processes. Prior to this, efforts by both the Portuguese and the Dutch were concentrated mainly on religious, economic and territorial conquest, in which they were partially successful. The Portuguese instigated the establishment of many Catholic churches, and simultaneously the destruction of many Hindu temples. This served mostly to drive Hindu practices underground, thereby auguring a strategy of silence among the Tamils when confronted with oppressive violence. Although there remains a sizable number of Christians on the peninsula: approximately fifteen percent both Roman Catholic and Protestants, they identify themselves fully with their Tamil ethnicity and culture (Hellman-Rajanayagam 2004). However, there was an impact from Hinduism's near destruction, but it was felt much later when it had to be virtually re-invented in the nineteenth century by the Hindu reformist, Arumugar Navalar (Pfaffenberger 1990). The Dutch had greater impact on social and economic life through their support and formal legitimization of the caste system, hitherto a much looser structure. This was for economic reasons according to Pfaffenberger; they supported the *Vellala* caste as cultivators who required indentured labourers to work the tobacco plantations, which were a thriving and highly successful export industry on the Jaffna peninsula. They would however, only employ Protestant Christians, thereby once again reinforcing a need for deception or more accurately, silence concerning religious affiliation; in this instance in order to obtain work. It was with the arrival of the British that the longer-term transformations to political, territorial and economic life took place, the repercussions of which continue into the present.

Perera N. (1999) talks of the "production" (p. 24) of Ceylon by the British that saw the destruction of "the principal traces of indigenous political power and cultural identity". In

the struggle with France for control of the eastern seaboard, the British (as other powers were to do decades later) saw the natural harbour at Tirukkonamalai as a strategic necessity. In wishing to wrest control from the East India Company, the British government fought to bring Ceylon under the control of the crown (Perera N. 1999). This resulted in the 'Peace of Amiens' in 1802, which relinquished jurisdiction from the Dutch to the British who then expanded outwards from Colombo until finally overthrowing the kingdom of Kandy in the central region. By the 1830s the whole of Ceylon was under one administrative structure that was controlled from Colombo and London, thereby establishing through its imperialist aims, an enterprise that would contribute towards the expansion of capitalism.

In pre-British colonial times, ethnic identities whether Sinhalese or Tamil, were not cause for such depths of hostility. Throughout the country, there were heterogeneous ethnic and religious configurations comprising; Tamil Hindus, Christians and Muslims and Sinhalese Buddhists, Christians and Muslims, all living comparatively settled existences alongside one another. Instead a system of localised, separated territories worked satisfactorily for both groups, was not based on ethnic identity but enabled relative stability and peaceful co-existence. Any disagreements were in fact more often between the religious groups inside the ethnic groups; for example there were more disagreements between Catholic and Hindu Tamils, than between Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics. However, two texts: the *Mahavamsa* and *Culavamsa*, later came to be used to promulgate divisions between the Tamils and Sinhalese by political extremism, which sought to perpetuate the myths surrounding a reputed hatred between Tamils and Sinhalese. These texts, compiled in the sixth century AD by Buddhist monks, have often been used to assert the inalienable rights of the Sinhalese in terms of language and religion.

Spencer (1990) argues that the conflict was not a result of "inherited destiny" or inalienable cultural differences founded in ancient history, but rather a consequence of modern political rhetoric and hegemonic depictions of ancient times through colonial racist reconfigurations of the past. He suggests that the rhetoric of politicians and militants/insurgents alike have subverted ancient history in arguing for their individual rights and interests. Jeganathan (1995) attempts to move beyond providing yet further historical evidence in the 'Tamil' versus 'Sinhalese' debate, by examining how

knowledge is produced in order to deconstruct notions of 'nationalism'. He also demonstrates the inherent unreliability of colonial-inspired translations of texts such as the *Mahavamsa*. Productions of so-called authoritative historical fact have come from what were most often oral debates, rather than written, authentic texts. This mis-translation fulfilled the colonial administrations' need to promulgate divisions within the community; a style of governance that through its divisiveness, asserted rights according to ethnic identity.

Trawick (2002) notes the unusual step taken by the British in sanctioning Buddhism as the state religion in 1815, as it went against their previously held principles of keeping state and religion separate. According to Trawick, in Sri Lanka it is accepted that the Buddha is the divine embodiment of "supernatural power and authority" (p.273); all Buddhists in Sri Lanka sanction his sovereignty. This ideal was perpetuated by the British in the treaty of 1815, whereby Buddhism was supported as the state religion, albeit in exchange for the cession of the province of Kandy.

Post-colonial Sri Lanka perpetuated the views of the British racial theorists by defining 'difference', for example in terms of a purported work ethic among the Tamils and most significantly, the formation of an elite. Hobsbawm (1987) highlights the emergence within colonised societies of a new elite class who had been westernised as a result of their exposure to a western education and language. In many instances the elite felt more at ease with their colonisers through shared ideologies. The work of missionaries impacted on other ways of defining difference through divisive practices based on affiliation and allegiance to a particular religion. Although not a direct consequence of 'imperialist politics', it was undoubtedly the result of expansionism, according to Hobsbawm (p.71); one that was predicated and constructed upon racist configurations: the white man perceived as responsible for 'educating' the native through the teachings of the Christian bible – furthermore translations of the bible were being produced on a massive scale during this period according to Bates (2006). This led to ethnic and racial differences being articulated through a modern, western-style political and socio-cultural discourse that was used as grounds for dividing the communities and perpetuating the civil conflict. Social, political and economic favouritism resulted in fear, resentment and eventually led to the scapegoating and exclusion of the minority Tamils. At each

successive wave of colonisation, the Tamils have been confronted with divisiveness, duplicity and betrayal. It is common to hear references made concerning an alleged propensity towards the Tamils' suspiciousness towards outsiders; suggested to me on more than one occasion and even identified amongst some Tamils themselves, but when one looks at the frequency with which they have been deceived, it is little surprise that they are inherently suspicious – not only towards obvious outsiders but also among themselves.

At around the same time, the British introduced Tamil migrant workers from southern India to work on the tea plantations, having been unsuccessful in persuading locals to fill these arduous jobs. They were housed separately on the outskirts of Sinhalese villages in the hill country, limiting opportunities for integration - something that had always been a fundamental part of Sri Lankan life, according to Tambiah (1986). The Tamils living in the hill country came to be seen by their northern Sri Lankan compatriots, as second-class citizens and there was little support of their presence on the island or assistance in their battles to gain citizenship. The particular concerns of the hill country Tamils, have been highlighted by Daniels (1996) in his extensive research in the region. The hill country Tamils subsequently played less of a role in the struggle for a Tamil 'homeland', largely through differences in language, customs and status. More recent efforts among the LTTE seek to redress this, and there have been moves to integrate the hill country Tamils within the cause of Tamil separatism.

Post-colonialism: state politics and a case for war is made

Following the exit of the British colonial powers in 1948, the United National Party (UNP) came to power represented by the majority, largely western educated, patrician elite under the leadership of Stephen D. Senanayake. The UNP adopted a British Westminster style system – single member constituency through an electoral structure, under the Soulbury Constitution (1947-1972). They were drawn largely from the elite Tamil and Sinhalese communities (McDowell, 1996), who had little understanding of the rural, economically deprived populace. They were largely protective of Sri Lankan Tamil

rights, which became perceived by many Sinhalese as favouritism; this was compounded by the lack of an effective left wing opposition party that could represent the ever growing and disaffected south. Unlike in India after independence, when the constitution was compelled to address the question of representation and protection for the minorities, the Donoughmore Commissioners responsible for establishing an electoral system in Sri Lanka, undertook quite the reverse. Instead, they based representation on territory with the result that there was a ratio of five to one, the Sinhalese holding the major part. This gave rise to the first indication of disaffection from the north and east. The Tamils held a boycott that was ignored by the government, heralding instead the beginning of a path to exclusion. This lack of representation occurred in part due to the slow reactions of Tamil politicians at the time. They had proposed a fifty-fifty share of seats between the Sinhalese majority and the other fifty to be shared between the minority groups; this was rejected in favour of a more realistic proportional representation of 57% and 43%, respectively. Subsequent proposals reduced further the number of seats offered until representation stood at 80% for the Sinhalese in the constitution of 1972, leaving the Tamils with few if any constitutional rights, but allowing parliament to make any future constitutional changes it wished.

Arasaratnam (1998) [1979] points out that prior to the 1950s, Sinhalese society was divided along class, regional and up versus low country lines; issues of ethnicity were largely irrelevant. Unfortunately following this constitutional disaster, the position changed with the introduction of clauses and changes to rights and the Tamils found themselves without recourse to protest. This in turn led to nationalist sentiments on both sides with the advent of the language and religious primacy of Sinhala and Buddhism, helping to instigate the Tamils consideration of a separatist agenda for the north and east. In 1956 the newly formed Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) under Soloman Bandaranaike, was elected. They were perceived as an anti-imperialist, pro-democratic and progressive party – similar to, but stronger than the Marxists. Most politicians of the newly elected SLFP came from the educated elite of the south and formally established Sinhala as the national language and Buddhism as the state religion. This opened up opportunities in education that were now directed in favour of Sinhalese students, whereas up until the 1950s the majority of graduates were Tamil speakers. In 1956 a

leading teacher training college was designated for Sinhala speaking students only; it was also recommended that Tamil and English educated students be forbidden to take the public exams until 1967. This was purportedly in order to redress a supposed 'imbalance' within the education system: by favouring Sinhalese students it was hoped that this would provide them with greater occupational opportunities. Tambiah (1986) describes the situation in the south at this same time as dominated by two groups: politicised Buddhist monks ("bikkhus") on the one hand, and a rural educated elite – mostly teachers, doctors and Ayurvedic practitioners, on the other. Hostile to the influences of the west, they were educated in Sinhalese, could speak on behalf of the village communities, and therefore were not accepted among the elite English speaking urban community. The Bikkhus, who formed a group of influential, politicised monks loyal to the rural leaders, advocated their own return to prominence in both state and social life. This was to the exclusion and alienation of both the Tamil and Muslim communities who saw it as a direct threat to their own interests. A *satyagraha* (non-violent protest in a Gandhian-style campaign) was held in Colombo by Tamil politicians to protest the denial of university places to Tamils and against the Sinhala Only Bill; brutal efforts by the police and army to remove them ended in a riot. These same police and military figures were later responsible for some of the worst violence and aggression perpetuated against large numbers of Sinhalese citizens during the southern insurgency.

The SLFP remained in power, despite the assassination of their leader S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike by a militant Bikkhu monk protesting against his pro-Tamil stance, under his wife Sirimavo's leadership until 1965. According to Moore (1985) she undertook sweeping economic reforms through a programme of socialist state control that attempted to tackle unemployment by nationalising some of the major industries at the expense of a private market economy. Simultaneously, she also sought to secularise the educational institutions. It was during this period that plans were introduced to build large-scale irrigation projects, aimed at developing the dry zones of the north and east for agricultural purposes, by constructing dams that would bring water to the region. Consequently, the northeast was chosen as an area of resettlement for Sinhalese peasants brought to work on these schemes. These were seen by many Tamils as another move to enforce Sinhalese Buddhist state ideologies that excluded them, whereas intellectuals in

the south saw this as monument building to secure a national identity (McDowell 1996). The Tamils and Muslims already residing in areas that were staked out for extensive irrigation works, claimed that they had been denied the same access rights as the Sinhalese settlers; this resulted in a period of rioting in 1956, and again in 1958 in protest at these project developments.

In 1956, attempts were made to relieve ethnic tensions by redressing some of the imbalances and inequalities mainly of the 'Sinhala Only Act', by proposing Tamil as an official language. Also efforts to secularise the education system and decentralise government administration by locally elected regional councils was proposed, to correct an over-centralisation of Ceylon's (as it was still called) administration. The Chelvanayagam-Bandaranaike Pact (1956-1957) sought to devolve power regionally and thereby give the Tamils of the north and east greater autonomy. However, this was seen by the UNP opposition party as providing too many concessions to the Tamils and rioting by some of the politicised Buddhist monks lead to the dissolution of the pact: a pact that in retrospect, many now see as the optimal time for differences to have been resolved.

In further examining the deterioration in Tamil-Sinhalese relations, Tambiah (1986) suggests that language was and continues to be, a more significant area of contention than religion. He links this with the desire of the majority for white collar, middle class employed status, with English language education at the centre of these ideals. The reality being that only a small percentage of the population can speak English and of these, most comprise the political elite leaving the majority of the population unable to communicate with any effect or understand issues of importance. Tambiah links both this desire for class status and linguistic incapacity, as enabling many of the atrocities and hostilities to continue unabated, unchallenged and undeterred.

In 1979 the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was passed. It had serious repercussions as it enabled suspects to be held without judicial review or access rights to relatives and lawyers. In 1982 the president called for the postponement of the elections for another six years, citing supposed plots to assassinate various leading political figures in the regime. This was agreed by a very narrow margin, in a climate of curfews, banned publications and the threat of mass intimidation at the polling booths. The PTA was disallowed in

2002 due to the cease-fire, but has unfortunately been reinstated due to the current volatile climate.

Contested space: the rise of national militancy

In 1964 the SLFP formed a coalition with the Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP). However, economic problems continued with rising population figures and unemployment, and the coalition failed. The UNP formed an alliance with the Tamil Federal Party (TMF) and again attempted to woo the Tamils through religious and ethnic reconciliation. In response, the SLFP joined the Bikkhus in opposing proposed concessions and there followed a period of increased inflation and unemployment, particularly in agriculture. In 1970, the UNP were again defeated by the SLFP and, supported by the LSSP and the communist party, formed the United Party (UP).

During this time, the economic and employment situation in the country continued to deteriorate; there were failed attempts to introduce an effective social welfare policy and this was exacerbated by a world-wide slump. Tensions increased until finally, an uprising took place among the rural, educated youth of southern Sri Lanka calling themselves the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) – the ‘People’s Liberation Front’.

In order to understand the problems facing Sri Lanka currently, it is necessary to examine the roles of the revolutionary movements of both the LTTE in the northeast, and the JVP in the far south. Both the southern and northern insurgents, although diametrically opposed to each other in terms of ideology, mirror each other in many aspects of their political and social development and are thus inextricably linked to any understanding of Sri Lanka’s problems. Although I do not seek to homogenise militant groups per se (de Mel 1998), the development of both the JVP and the LTTE do have similar roots. These are posited in reactions against post-colonial interests and their disillusionment with the government’s response to losses of economic and educational opportunities. Although anathema to each other, they both originated as Marxist movements but became patriotic, nationalist movements when their respective identities were under threat of becoming subsumed under ‘outside’ influence. For the JVP it was both the crushing of their movement by the army and police force during its early inception in the 1970s, followed

by the arrival of the Indian army as a peacekeeping force in the north in the late 1980s. This saw a more militant brand of nationalism in response to perceived threats from India whom they suspected of propagating its own form of nationalistic chauvinism in an attempt to subjugate the country and destroy its identity as a stronghold of Buddhist thought and culture.^{xiv} Whereas for the LTTE, it was the undermining of their political power and identity from the early 1970s onwards by the southern polity that led to their strengthening nationalist position and concurrent desire for separation and self-governance. They diverge mostly in terms of their nationalist aims and respective levels of militancy. The JVP provided a revolutionary voice for the peasant population of the south through a military style organisation and leadership. Living under brutalising poverty and economic hardship, the JVP offered a movement for change that would address the inequalities witnessed among the corrupt and wealthy elites in Colombo and surrounding urban centres. Through “thuggery and harassment” (Gunaratna 1990:iv) attempts were made to quell their political uprising. This only provoked the JVP to the ‘April Revolt’ of 1971, wherein they attacked police stations all over the far south and were summarily crushed by military forces, during which thousands were killed. It was over a remarkably brief period of time that these thousands were either publicly executed by the army or were left unaccounted for; instead joining the ranks of the euphemistically labelled: ‘disappeared’. Villager was pitted against villager depending on status as either a JVP ally or a supporter and family member of the police or army. Entire village communities still have to live in continued close proximity to the killers of their family members, without redress (Perera S. 1995).

Help in crushing the uprising was received from western allies of the government, in terms of training and arms: attempts to extend socio-economic reforms that would get to the root of the problem, failed. This was a precursor to fundamental changes in the political atmosphere (as well as a break with the British crown), wherein violence became the response to disagreement and protest, rather than open democratic debate – the political powers calling on the army and police to maintain order and crush all dissension from now on, backed up by nefarious international organisations trading and selling arms to any and all sides. Despite this, the JVP continued to receive considerable support from both the rural and urban poor of the south and, according to some commentators, feeling

under threat, President Jayewardena proscribed the organisation thus preventing them from joining the political mainstream.

It was not until 1988 that the JVP resurfaced: reformed and intent on a second attempt at revolution. Again thousands were murdered, although this saw the erosion of support for the JVP in some quarters when families of the police and army were directly targeted and killed. It was a time of intense and brutal carnage that is still ingrained on the collective consciousness of the south. This uprising lasted from 1987 to 1989, many of the original members of the JVP were either captured or killed: their leader Rohanna Wijeweera was arrested and killed in November 1989 and for many years they were a weakened and leaderless organisation. Over the years however, they have regrouped and have managed to join the political mainstream; winning seats in the government after the 2004 elections and briefly forming a coalition with the SLFP government of Chandrika Kumaratunga – whose own husband Vijaya, when President, was assassinated by the JVP. Currently they hold a central position of power, having maintained a grip on the economically impoverished regions of the south and a potent voice within the government. Known to be anti-LTTE, they are held in suspicion by many in the north as well as among some of the southern elite, but are tolerated as a political party in preference to a revolutionary movement.

The origins of Tamil grievances

Prior to the 1970s, conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese was situated equally among both political communities and was competitive in nature; each vying for supremacy, rather than confrontation. It was described as a “middle-class” phenomenon by Arasaratnam (1998:296) [1979] that was restricted to struggles for position within the hierarchy of the English educated elites. It was during the search for a national identity as early as the 1920s, that problems first arose. Disagreement as to the number of seats to be allocated between the Sinhalese and Tamils in the Ceylon National Congress’s constitutional reforms saw an early indication of future conflict with separate Tamil political parties beginning to form. But at this stage concerns were still focussed on the

struggle for national unity that would also include the protection of Tamil rights. It was the isolationist policies of the 1970s that lead to the disillusionment of the Tamils in terms of access to educational opportunities and recognition of their status as an acknowledged minority, with clear rights and parity with their Sinhalese neighbours. With the erosion of these rights, many across the political spectrum as well as the civilian population became more conscious of their Tamil identity as something that had to be fought for and defended. This was the generation who were growing up in a world of restricted rights and fewer opportunities, who witnessed the undermining of their religion, language and economic status within their own country. As a result of this, the various Tamil parties coalesced under the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in 1975 and for the first time, through the Vaddukoddai resolution of 1976, identified a separate Tamil homeland as the only solution (Krishna 1998).

The TULF over the long term could not speak for the majority of Tamil youth based in the north and east: they were seen as too entrenched among the English speaking elites of Colombo and consequently had lost considerable loyalty by the mid-nineteen eighties. The more militant youth groups however, won increasing support largely on the basis of limited options, and especially when put against the TULFs perceived remoteness from local concerns. This was compounded when they were asked to swear an oath of allegiance; the TULF ministers refused and lost all their seats in parliament making them virtually powerless. On moving to Madras in an effort to win the support of Mrs Gandhi, the TULF only lost further confidence with the Sri Lankan Tamils. They had little impact on events in the north where an armed struggle instigated by the Jaffna youth, disillusioned with the pacifist approaches of the more senior members of TULF, was in progress. In 1983, thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers were ambushed and killed in the north by a Tamil militant group; this sparked reprisals that instigated the looting and burning of Tamil properties and the brutal killing of over 1,000 Tamils in the capital, Colombo, and outlying towns. The army presence in the north (sent during an earlier period of rioting) exacerbated the situation and they came into more frequent conflict with the Jaffna youths, escalating the violence. The Tamils started to receive support from both India and the international community: Tamil youths were given training and arms by India, whilst

the international communities under the auspices of protecting human rights became involved in monitoring and providing aid (Gunatilleke 1998).

In response to growing frustration from all sides in the north and east, a new group calling itself the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) under the leadership of the young and militant Vellupillai Prabhakaran, began fighting in earnest for recognition of a separate state for Tamils in the north and east of the country. He advocated separation as the only solution to the plight of Tamils and quickly saw himself as the only viable leader in this struggle. Consequently over the years he has continued to both maintain his position as leader in a struggle for *suthanthiram* (independence), and to oversee the removal of all Tamil opposition and dissent. Initially, even among the more conservative members of Tamil society his ideology concerning self-determination was appealing, if not his methods for achieving it. Talks held at Thimpu in Bhutan, in the mid-eighties addressed four basic principles that the Tamils were seeking:

Recognition of the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a distinct national entity; an identified Tamil homeland; the inalienable right of self-determination of the Tamil nation; recognition of the right of full citizenship and other fundamental rights of the Tamils who look upon the island as their country (Gunatilleke 1998: 401).

These remain principally the same today within the LTTE at least, if not among the other Tamil parties. Whether these terms are negotiable among the LTTE, is equivocal however. There are suggestions that the Tamil Tigers are prepared to consider alternative settlements to full independence, but this has also been contested from various sources and the LTTE are regarded as intractable in their demand for a separate homeland. Clarity on this issue is not forthcoming and shifts, depending on perceived levels of threat.

By the early nineteen-eighties there were countless Tamil political and militant groups vying for positions of supremacy in fighting the injustices wrought by the state. These included: TULF, PLOTE, EPRLF, TELO, LTTE, EROS, and up to 30 more (see appendix I). These new leaders emerging from the north were responsible for the moves towards separatism as the only recourse for Tamils discriminated against not only by the

Sinhalese, but also to some extent by their own Tamil political leaders residing at a distance in the capital. They came from the younger 'home-grown' rural communities of the Jaffna peninsula; the majority known euphemistically as 'the Boys', came from the northern shores of the Jaffna peninsula around Velvettithurai (known as VVT) and Point Pedro^{xv}. Their increased militancy was initially in direct response to the loss of university places for Tamils, the loss of Tamil as a nationally recognised language and the shift in jobs towards the south, made more threatening by moves to colonise Tamil land in the east with Sinhalese migrant workers, which resulted in much reduced opportunities for the Tamils.

Many of the Tamil militant organisations had some success in the early days and initially received support from Tamils locally, but none had the organisational skills and ruthless capacity for self-promotion of the LTTE, who by the mid-eighties became the self-appointed spokespersons for the Tamil '*makkal*' (people). Most of these opposition groups disbanded or were eradicated by the LTTE, in various notorious assassinations within the environs of Jaffna. Some militant groups continue to operate even within the north itself, albeit under heavy protection from the SLA: such as the EPDP and PLOTE. Their positions are controversial however, as they have also been accused of acts of atrocity including murder and bribery of Tamil voters particularly in the rural outlying villages with alcohol and other commodities.

The ensuing years saw different phases of the conflict between the government and the renamed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Each phase was interspersed with a cease-fire: Eelam War I (1983-1987), Eelam War II (1990-1994) and Eelam War III started in 1995 and continued until the current cease-fire in 2002 – the longest held so far, although under increasing threat of moving to Eelam War IV. There have been ferocious battles and bloody massacres of civilians on both sides of the conflict, but no progress in the fundamental adversarial positions of either side, or gains for Sri Lankan citizens has been achieved. In fact with the recent addition of renegade factional fighting, the conflict has become even more complex.

But first, how did the Tamil Tigers transformation from "resistance martyrs" occur? The origins of the current Tamil predicament concerns the Tamil politics of the post-independence era, the rising insurgency from among the various Tamil groups and the

ascendancy of one group in particular; the Tamil Tigers. It also concerns the involvement of the southern political elite, now including the politicised Buddhist clergy, who continue to undermine the peace process through the distorted use of political, historical and ethnic hatred in an attempt to maintain their grip on power. This has led to factionalism, ethnic hatred and the continuing economic poverty of large regions of the country. The LTTE's transformation from rebellious, resistance martyrs on the one hand to dominant enforcers of a separatist cause on the other, has incurred enormous cost to their own people. They have fought on behalf of the Tamils against southern political domination and early on took the hidden text into the public domain through extreme acts of aggression and violence, aimed at protesting against the discriminatory practices of the southern politicians. From the mid-1970s onwards, they moved to a position of open insubordination as their demands remained unsatisfied and they resorted to a position of increasing militancy and aggression that came to include violent suppression towards those Tamils calling for greater consensus regarding political free will. In order to maintain both financial, political and military support for the war, ever more strict measures were required to convince the Tamils that the fight was worth all the blood-shed and carnage. The increasing use of propaganda by the Tamil Tiger media – including towards the Tamil diaspora to shore up support, entailed closer monitoring of any potential dissent. The call to arms involved the martialling of historical memory as a way of providing contingency, but this led to much confusion and anomaly for the Tamils of the north who wished more than anything for an end to hostility and violence, but also felt and continue to feel the need for protection of their rights and safety as minority citizens within a hostile state. This is familiar from other long and protracted conflicts such as Northern Ireland and Palestine and further back even to the French Revolution: years of oppression, marginalisation and silencing lead to growing demands for equality and recognition of status, but when this fails demands for secession are made.

Over the years both the LTTE and the military resorted to the increasing use of sophisticated weaponry, including suicide bombers and multi-barrelled rocket launchers to attack, subdue and undermine not only each other's forces, but also Tamil civilians. The LTTE managed to evade capture by the use of a cyanide capsule worn around the neck, to be taken in order to prevent betrayal under interrogation and the army operated

under the protection of the government and the deployment of networks of special task force agents to infiltrate Tamil areas. In the meantime, ordinary unarmed Tamil civilians were arbitrarily arrested under the PTA and had to endure imprisonment and torture. The ruthlessness of both factions also serves as a marker of intent: to demonstrate the seriousness of their objectives and as a display of power.

The propaganda that has been employed by both sides has compounded political confusion and civilian uncertainty. One aspect that adds to the confusion of lies and counter-lies is the contradictory messages that come from both sides relating to responsibility for hostile actions: both tend to deny involvement instead apportioning blame on each other - unlike other political and militant organisations.^{xvi} The LTTE, rarely own their attacks openly although information is sometimes allowed to seep out covertly, to serve as a warning or if the evidence is proved overwhelming. The government also never owns their acts of infiltration and sabotage, carried out by the Special Task Force (STF), nor do they admit the involvement of other international intelligence networks in training Sri Lankan forces and supplying arms. In the current climate, both seem intent on muddying the waters and thus provoking aggressive retaliatory actions by both sides.

Prabhakaran (known colloquially as '*anna*': older brother or '*thampi*': younger brother, or 'Sun God' among some in the diaspora) is probably one of the few remaining Tamil militant figures alive who was present at the inception of the conflict. The rest have all been assassinated, killed in battle, died by combative suicide, or moved abroad; not only from the LTTE but also from other multifarious political and militant ranks. Most of Prabhakaran's own original group of senior cadres are dead; from former key figures in the movement, none remain from the early years (political 'strategist' Anton Balasingham who was based in London, died recently^{xvii}). Many other senior political activists and civic leaders have met their death through assassination or caught in inter-factional fighting; including two mayors of Jaffna, numerous journalists, several school principals and university students. With the defection of senior eastern cadre V. Muralitharan, alias Karuna Amman, the LTTE are more than ever under pressure to maintain their power base, especially in the north.

There are various explanations regarding Karuna's defection, some of which engage more with conspiracy theories. Undoubtedly however, this defection was an enormous shock for most people throughout the country; the LTTE organisation brooks no dissent - disagreement with the fundamental principles of the movement is seldom countenanced. Some suspect government interference manoeuvred the rift as a way of undermining the northern Vanni-located power base. Others claim the softening effect of the UNP, who have been relatively lenient and given the LTTE many concessions over the cease-fire period, has paradoxically removed the Tigers' strength and legitimacy as sole spokespersons for the Tamil cause: their strength lying in adversity. Others cite outside influences and covert interventions by various other nations and their intelligence groups following the US 'War on Terror' campaign. Also and importantly, the growing frustration of those in the east who see themselves as second-class citizens within the north-east homeland concept; often used as front-line troops and under greater pressure than in the north to provide cadres. Monitoring and pressure is currently being applied more heavily on the Jaffna peninsula, as the militants cannot countenance a repetition of the situation in the east where a virtual 'shadow war'^{xviii} between the LTTE, the renegade Karuna faction and the army, is taking place. Manipulation of villagers by various groups seeking to claim their loyalty and support, use offers of money, alcohol and other much needed commodities – especially following the 2005 tsunami. Information spreads quickly across this small region through a network of informing and observation; little escapes notice, giving rise to distrust and anger. In the meanwhile, the original grievances of the Tamils remain unresolved.

Constructions of an indigenised 'other'

According to Foucault (1971) identity is conceived as a social phenomenon dependent on the historical setting in which it is asserted. Discourses concerning identity are of particular relevance within the Sri Lankan context wherein the Tamils have become construed as 'other' within the Sinhalese historical-political and nationalist lexis. This indigenised 'other' arose out of failures in the post-colonial era, to construct a national

identity that would encompass all Sri Lankans under one united and cohesive state. A federalised system was too complex and difficult to negotiate in a setting of high unemployment and escalating partisanship; instead a rapid onslaught of open conflict and warfare ensued. These same questions remain today, implying that the fundamental points of contestation that lead to the conflict are yet to be determined.

In post-apartheid South Africa, new policies attempting to identify linguistic categories have their origins in western ideas that view language and territory as inseparable. This does not take into account South Africa's multitudinous languages and dialects that are fluid and uncategorisable. By seeking to identify and classify language, account is not being taken of its usage, which incorporates and crosses over regions and ethnic groups (Cook 2006:53). European missionaries entering South Africa during the nineteenth century, brought with them ideas that sought to identify, categorise and differentiate the languages, customs and cultural practices they observed, thus giving preference to the notion of an identity that was all-inclusive. In Sri Lanka a similar problem seems to exist whereby in order to maintain the concept of the nation state, identification through language and religious authority is seen as imperative. This is in direct contrast with earlier times when difference was accommodated without antagonism. This at once alienates those outside this inclusive concept of unificatory adherence to the dominant structures. The response from the minority and more militant Tamils has been to demand a separate homeland for themselves within the north and east of Sri Lanka^{xix}.

However, in terms of contested territory and identity, the geographical configuration of Tamils places the majority *outside* the designated margins of the proposed Tamil homeland^{xx}. Nearly fifty percent live in Sinhalese dominated territory, some having sought work in the cities and some brought over by the British from Tamil Nadu in India, to work on the tea plantations in the hill country. Within the concept of a viable 'homeland', usually Tamils are situated in the north and east of the country; however, this does not account for those Tamils who live outside these areas. Neither does it allow for the configuration of a Tamil identity that includes both hill country and Muslim Tamils - neither of whom identify closely with the militants' ideology or their separatist enterprise. Attempts to locate a Tamil 'homeland' are instantly problematic, emotive and an explosive construction with the potential to undermine the fundamental principles of

Tamil consciousness. As Tambiah suggests, this makes the activities of the separatists one of high risk, with consequences for the many Tamils living outside the northern and eastern regions, as it necessitates the regrouping of all Tamils back into the designated regions.

Identity's fluid and changing nature defies easy categorisation. In Sri Lanka, identities – especially those of the Tamils, have had to adapt along with the vast changes in the political, economic and social landscape. The Tamils have been challenged to confront their position within Sri Lankan society and chauvinistic policies that have led to their exclusion and marginalisation. Remarkably, there is little mention made of the four hundred years of colonial rule or its consequences. There is scant acknowledgement of this period and its aftermath, which has undoubtedly played such a pivotal role in shaping the country and its response to the current problems. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the fears aroused not only over potential neo-colonisation, but also of western modernity can be seen from the responses to the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and some of the large international NGOs. The SLMM comprises monitors from various Nordic countries and are present in the country to monitor the cease-fire agreement and to assess whether it is being properly upheld. The majority are placed within the north and east, where conflict is most likely to occur, and here they are cautiously welcomed if not confided in: they seem mostly to provide a reassuring presence – more so than the INGOs who have more direct interventionist motives and are held in some suspicion. However, in parts of the south they are viewed with even greater suspicion and even some hostility, as defenders of the LTTE and therefore supporters of separation and disunity. There have been many protests in the capital demanding their removal: the perception among the JVP and JHU in particular, is that they are biased agents who support the Tamil Tigers in undermining the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan state and crucially, are supported by those western countries with a large Tamil diaspora.

In furtherance of their respective causes, both the government and militants have utilised identity and ethnicity to conceptualise and support notions of 'otherness'. This has divided all communities and recalls Bateson's theory on schismogenesis (1972:) whereby points of differentiation are constantly evoked. These epistemological constructions have been marshalled to alienate and divide both Tamils and Sinhalese,

thereby enabling the domination of both. Both Tamils and Sinhalese have been particularised from colonial times onwards, with specific stereotypical images that conform to the needs of those in power: maintaining absolute control through the divisive tactics of separation and segregation through an identification of difference. Whether colonists, present day politicians or militants, this image is perpetuated through dichotomous stereotypes such as: hard-working/lazy, aggressive/passive, dark skinned/light skinned, and these stereotypes have become established and accepted as a form of social, ethnic and religious self- and 'other' identification. What purpose do these oppositional images serve? In the case of Sri Lankans, they have lead to the segregation, intolerance and ethnic hatred that has brought suffering to all sides and that has generally been imposed from 'outside' and 'above': from 'outside' as a result of colonialism, and 'above' by those desirous of maintaining the elite social order.

For the purposes of this study I have focussed on the northern Jaffna Tamils as a distinct and largely homogenous group of ethnic Sri Lankan Tamils. Identities continue to change following the cease-fire, under the new impact of globalisation and returning Tamil exiles, who now visit the north in large numbers to re-establish contact with their home country. Jaffna Tamil identities depend on caste^{xxi} and class status; religion and whether you live in the town, country or islands – all are distinct^{xxii}, but nevertheless a collective Tamil identity can be reflected upon. The north has always been a predominantly Tamil region but since the war, there is even greater homogeneity of ethnicity and religion, largely as a result of the enforced exodus of both Sinhalese and Muslims. Predominant in the north are the Hindu Tamils (89%) and Christian Tamils (11%). Other areas of the country including the capital city of Colombo, the eastern regions of Tirukkonamalai and Batticaloa, the hill country and the north west, comprise multi-ethnic and religious populations, not in equal measure (apart from Tirukkonamalai), but more heterogeneous than the north.

The militants have used the notion of a Tamil identity to win support for their cause of separatism and independence from the elite political forces in the south. This has lead many to question the notion of a Tamil identity that now appears fragmented and at risk of disintegration. There is more than one paramilitary group and loyalties within the differing factions are under constant question with defections, surrenders and

assassinations. This is a familiar reenactment for the Tamils, as memories of the IPKF intervention remains fresh in many minds.

Negative stereotypical identities have been challenged and re-negotiated in moves against elitist politicians and rhetoric from the media. From within the field of social science, there have been many efforts to realign Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim identities in a more thoughtful and tolerant framework. Scholars from within the local and trans-national Tamil and Sinhalese communities, as well as some western writers have described and analysed the concept of 'nationhood' and its inherent difficulties (Jeganathan and Ismail, 1995). They have employed various methods in doing this that include feminist studies from both Tamil and Sinhalese scholars seeking to break down many of the stereotypes that have entrapped both communities in a quagmire of blame and recrimination.

Local rhetoric on the other hand, was seldom as inclusive and many indigenous stereotypes were part of regular conversations and ideas concerning terms of difference and identity. I would be told of the considerable differences between the Tamils of the northern peninsula and the Tamils of the east, for example. In the east, the inhabitants had a reputation for non-Agamic^{xxiii} worship and a close link with the spirit world; they were known as great raconteurs and apparently possessed talents in and of, the supernatural world. They could bewitch vulnerable northern males in particular: northern wives were reluctant to allow their husbands to go east on business in case they fell prey to these eastern females and might never return. They had a talent for curing a variety of ailments as well as instigating curses, and mixing love potions to magical effect. At the same time they were also known for their extreme generosity, openness and hospitality, whereas the Jaffna Tamils had I was told, a reputation for suspiciousness, exclusivity, a great love of gold and a more prosaic attitude to the Gods and the spirit world. Their ability to work hard in both education and labour was mentioned often, although sometimes with a sense of nostalgia for a past, pre-war era. Like all clichés and generalisations, some had a measure of truth and some were unfounded fabrication, but they served to differentiate and mark 'otherness'. These constructions of difference are powerful and certainly had some role in the defection of Karuna, who claimed that the Vanni LTTE leaders treated eastern Tamils unfairly. This clearly resonated with some other eastern cadres who chose

to stay with him, despite the ensuing violence wrought by the LTTE's efforts to corral support back within the central body in the north.

Recent research (Ashiwa, Shanmugalingam and Perera, 2003) has shown that most Tamils in the northern peninsula identify themselves primarily as 'Jaffna Tamils' (25%), next as 'Tamil', followed by 'Sri Lankan Tamils' and finally as 'Sri Lankan'. This confirms a localised identity that Tamils in Sri Lanka hold, and that is supported by Tamils living in other regions of the country^{xxiv}. Interestingly, in relation to their Sinhalese neighbours the research suggests that the Jaffna Tamils recognise that responsibility for their woes lie not with their Sinhalese neighbours but rather with the Sinhalese politicians. According to Ashiwa et al, 50% of Tamils state that the Sinhalese have also suffered through the war, but with the caveat that this has not been to the same degree as they have – 83% agreeing with this qualifying statement. Significantly, the younger age group of 21-30 year olds, when asked if they could live alongside the Sinhalese, 58% responded in the affirmative as opposed to the older age group of 30-41 year olds; 55% of whom could not. This is despite the younger age group having been the main target group for considerable persecution and having been born and grown in an environment of war. Perhaps the older generation have clearer recollections of the political acts perpetrated against them and the anti-Tamil pogroms of the 1970s and early 1980s, which sparked the conflict, whereas the younger generation have been under greater pressure to continue fighting in a conflict about which they are increasingly uncertain as to both its history and root cause, and consequently this younger generation may identify itself more with the Sinhalese soldiers, as counterparts. It was known that some fraternisation between local Tamil youths and Sinhalese soldiers was quite common.

At the time of my research, there were a number of Sinhalese students at Jaffna University who had good relationships with their fellow students and lecturers. They stated that they felt comfortable and happy at the university: mixing freely and accepted among their fellow students. Sadly owing to recent deterioration in the north these students have had to leave Jaffna and are unlikely to return until the situation improves.

Explorations of the rising violence

In seeking an explanation for the conflict within the country as a whole, Obeyesekere (1984) describes how changes in the economy linked to a general increase in the population, lead to enforced migration from the rural southern villages into the urban cities in search of work. Various groups were forced into close proximity through economic necessity, leading to disagreements related to business interests, which in turn escalated in a fomentation of hostility and antagonism across the south. Similarly, in the north-eastern regions of Sri Lanka, the Mahaweli Ganga Dam project^{xxv} instigated numerous resettlement projects that brought disparate groups into close and tense proximity, all vying for control and influence. Some Tamils in the region felt the introduction of large numbers of Sinhalese into the north-east was aimed at destroying their right to a separate homeland. Concurrently, there was also a rise in the phenomenon of so-called *Goondas* - 'thugs' - largely ex-soldiers from the Sri Lankan army who were hired by local and national political groups to settle disputes through violent means. Within this context the Jatika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS – National Workers Organisation) trade union became very powerful under the auspices of one Cyril Mathew. They sought to disrupt opposition to the UNP ruling party of the time and the police were inactive in preventing the erosion of civil liberties by the JSS. There were attacks aimed at the Colombo Tamil business community as well as other sections of society, including the judiciary (Tambiah 1986). Civil disturbances rose and very little was done to control these outbreaks or to redress the causes; the police were passive and did nothing to stem the tide of corruption taking place within the UNP government and JSS trade union, both of whom sought to divide power and increase their financial status. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, they set about gaining control of the political and economic terrain by thuggery and corruption, thereby setting the scene for the anti-Tamil riots and the eventual pogrom of 1983.

Within this setting there was a burgeoning of ecstatic cults, one of the most significant being at Kathirkamam (or Kataragama, as it known in the south) in the southeast. This was one of the most important holy sites in Sri Lanka for Hindu Tamils, Sinhalese

Buddhists and Muslim Tamils alike; one of the few places to recognise the synchronicity of religious worship.^{xxvi} However, from as early as the colonial period, Hindu Tamils were discouraged from making their annual pilgrimage to Kathirkamam (travelling from the northern Murugan Temple in Jaffna and down the eastern coast to the holy site), ostensibly to avoid the spreading of disease. Later during the 1980s, the conflict contributed to the diminishing attendance by Hindu worshippers. Tambiah (1986) and Obeyesekere (1977), through their respective studies of changing Kathirkamam worship have highlighted some of the origins of preoccupations with national identity among the Sinhalese. Tambiah describes how nationalistic Buddhist ideologies grew out of the gradual erosion of the social structures that had formerly held together the various groups. In order to re-assimilate a cohesive identity, attempts were made to enforce some sense of homogeneity, as evidenced in the cult of Kathirkamam, but as Tambiah suggests, one divested of its “universalistic ethical message” (1986:60). Likewise, Obeyesekere notes the sudden upsurge in Buddhist interest and the popularity of this site from the 1940s onwards; devotees (particularly the urban middle classes) began attending to ask favours relating to marriage, business, educational and political prospects. He also points out how Sinhalese Buddhist devotees have borrowed Hindu practices such as fire-walking (although not *thuukkukkaavadi*) and have built devotional shrines to Kathirkamam around many urban centres. Both authors comment on the past lack of division between Tamils and Sinhalese who shared holy sites and worshipped at each other’s shrines, forming a cohesive and integrated approach and attitude to religion. It was not until the search for differentiated national identities (as opposed to an *inclusive* national identity) that the past became distorted and was used by those in power to further their own political and economic agendas, ultimately leading ordinary Sri Lankans to view their neighbours with such hostility and suspicion.

In Kapferer’s study on violence and healing rituals (1988), he examines how Buddhism in Sri Lanka has also been conditioned by Sinhalese chauvinism that uses cosmology, myth and legend to uphold and support a discourse of nationalism. He asserts that this has lead to non-Buddhists being relegated to subordinate positions within the hierarchy; their ostracism from positions of power within the social and political system has ultimately resulted in the fragmentation of state, nation and person. He goes on to assert that

Sinhala-Buddhist efforts at domination are an example of ontological forces but, along with other authors - Spencer predominantly - I would advocate that historical perspectives that perpetuate ingrained and fixed abstractions of causality do not allow for the possibility of fluid change over time.

This process continues to be upheld by successive governments and others in elite positions, eager to maintain their power and influence. The need for a scapegoat to divert attention away from the root causes of mass unemployment, poverty and poor health, found a target in Sri Lanka's largest minority group: the Tamils. As stated, Tamils had for some time been viewed as holding too many advantages and opportunities in jobs and education – a view that although long out of date provided a convenient diversion from the frustration, anger and powerlessness felt among the southern, educated but economically deprived villagers of the south. During the riots of 1983, it was the wealthy Tamil traders living in Colombo who were the main focus for anger and attack; targeted destruction of property and theft was a key aspect as well as the violence to the Tamil people themselves. This was to recur later in the north, when the Sinhalese army took control of the peninsula. Many families, especially those living on the islands who again comprised the wealthier land-owning and trading families, had their homes and possessions ransacked, destroyed and desecrated in acts of revenge and anger at the perceived inequalities between the soldiers' families and the Jaffna Tamils. Now, the houses and villages that were once the symbol of Tamil success and wealth on the islands, stand deserted and in ruins: testament to both the anger of the impoverished southern soldiers and abandonment by the wealthy into exile abroad. Those living on the islands now, are the few families who have returned from displacement elsewhere on the island, some temporary makeshift refugee settlements and the large Sri Lankan army camps, all of whom live in uneasy proximity to one another.

PART II: TRANSFORMATIONS

Chapter 4

Changing Social Realities

The man is lowered slowly and carefully down into the empty well by thick rope attached to the horizontal lever above: the *thula*. His loosely turbaned head disappears as he descends, rotating gently until finally coming to rest on the bottom some ten metres below. The sides of the well beyond the first meter of smoothly covered concrete, are rough hewn and the bottom consists of a porous layer of coral from which the water has been drained and blocked off. The man has his cleaning tools lowered to him in a plastic bucket; a palmyra brush and chlorine that he uses to clean the sides and the floor of the well. After he has completed this task, he takes the small rectangular block of camphor and a brass *akal* (lamp) filled with ash-coloured incense coals that are passed down to him. The camphor is lit and the incense smokes thickly; the man waves the lantern around the well slowly until the entire space is infused with pungent, dense smoke and he is almost obscured from view. In the final stage, he emerges and releases the water that has been blocked from entering through a pipe in the wall and the fresh water flows back into the cleansed and purified well. The well – or *kinaru*, lies on an easterly axis to the shrine room and is ritually cleansed each year in preparation for *Pudhu Varudam* (New Year) to mark a time of transition, renewal and regeneration when the Sun moves into the first house of the zodiac.

The well is integral to life in the northern peninsula; it provides the main source of water in this parched and arid terrain where there are no rivers and few streams. Preservation of them is essential not only for their life sustaining properties, but also as a symbol of spiritual purity both in temple ceremonies and domestic rituals. Their destruction and contamination during the war threatened not only the physical survival of the inhabitants, but also undermined and demoralised their sense of well-being. The fragmentary remains

of thousands of communal wells destroyed during the war symbolically mark the destruction of local villages: their social and structural cohesion damaged along with the dispersal of the Tamils. Newly installed communal taps have been positioned at the roadside, as part of a project to replace the destroyed public wells. It is a common sight to see women and children queuing with large plastic containers, waiting for the water to become available so they can collect it and then quickly return home.

Before, villagers would come together around these wells to wash, chat and exchange local information. Their destruction removed a valued social space that enabled the community to function as a self-supporting unit^{xxvii}; concerns at village (*uur*) level would be discussed and managed through internal, locally sanctioned modes of social responsibility. Villagers had limited access to communities other than their own and although there were inter-village rivalries and conflict, they were managed on the whole through their knowledge and understanding of a locally defined social system^{xxviii}. There was an informal hierarchical structure that maintained social stability and safety for the inhabitants through an arrangement of civic leaders, elders and other respected members of the community. The need for external scrutiny and intervention was not required because of this network, which included the *Grama Sevaka* (an administrative official responsible for managing community affairs), religious leaders, healers, teachers, Ayurvedic and Siddha doctors. Among these the local *parihari* was a valued member who, through his extensive knowledge of plants, herbs, concoctions and decoctions from Ayurvedic medicine would visit families monthly to check each members health. Not only would he check pulses for signs of ill health or prescribe prophylactic treatments but he would also proffer advice and provide information to families concerning for example; who had reached the onset of puberty and was therefore eligible for marriage^{xxix}. Illnesses would be reported, providing information to the groom's family and vice versa. He was also known to have a connection with the spirit world that enabled him to provide guidance and advice on a wide variety of concerns. Now the few *parihari*'s still working are visited in their own homes by people largely unknown to them; they no longer have access to an in depth knowledge of the families and their various ailments.

The Jaffna Tamils are organised into endogamous, consanguineous, cognate descent groups, and in many instances still practice cross-cousin marriage, although this is less

prevalent than in the past. Caste and class remain dominant features and most marriages are still arranged through a broker or trusted friend/relative. Changes to the composition of not only village, but also family membership highlight some of the more significant transformations that have taken place. Before the war families (*kurumbam*) comprised large extended kin connections that were self-contained and required only peripheral contact with those outside the immediate kinship system. The wife took decisions jointly with her *maamiyar* (mother-in-law) regarding the care of children and household management. It was the most senior, male member of the family who had responsibility for both finances and the upholding of ritual and ceremonial practice. All earnings were given to him (or the eldest son on his death or in the case of infirmity), which left the “whole family free to enjoy life, so there was no need to gossip” (*uur vai* – mouth of the village) according to one interviewee. Now there is an increased burden on other individual family members to take over financial responsibility. Increasingly this lies with the wife who must take charge of her husbands’ salary in the absence of a more senior person, as well as her other responsibilities and in many cases she must also contribute to the family income; this has raised anxieties and marital tensions for many women.

The war blew families apart leading to their fragmentation, displacement and in some cases “total destruction” as I was told. Consequently families became small, insular units whose dispersed membership led to alienation and estrangement. It is not uncommon for these once large families to have lost entire sibling and parental support; one interviewee was the only member of his family still living in Sri Lanka; his mother and six siblings all departed to various countries in Europe and Canada. His wife also has only one sister out of a family of seven living in Sri Lanka.

Although neighbourhoods are being re-established, membership frequently comprises strangers. Many who were displaced have had to occupy the ruined homes of Tamils who were forced to flee the war. Efforts to establish cohesive, permanent and safe settlements in which to live are thwarted by the possible return of Tamils wishing to reclaim their properties, as well as the knowledge that one’s own home lies unoccupied only a few kilometers away inside the HSZ. These families are effectively living in borrowed homes, unable to establish any sense of permanence within these fractured and unstable

communities, where 'home' remains an elusive entity. It works against previous social convention and in the present climate of suspicion and hostility, does not enable easy cohabitation. There are also regular instances of returning Tamils taking recourse to the law in order to evict displaced Tamils from their homes, causing in the process much hostility and anguish on all sides. Presently, Jaffna town functions as a large village; there is little to differentiate them and therefore similar problems seem to prevail within both settings: neighbours unknown to one another; violence carried out by unknown, outside perpetrators and an overall feeling of precariousness and insecurity. These insecurities extend to the situation in the north generally, concerning the possible consequences following the breakdown of peace talks.

Abroad, families are often spread far apart rather than together in one country. As a consequence of sudden escape, or through the offer of job and educational opportunities, dispersal is also the experience of Tamils in exile. Tamil communities abroad are therefore also composed of strangers and regular conflicts arise within these neighbourhoods that relate to politically motivated as well as caste disputes. As Daniel (1997) has described, the Tamil communities in the UK arrived in successive waves, for diverse reasons and assorted ideas about the concept of 'the nation' and "a nationalised past" (p.312). They had to contend with varying degrees of acceptance or hostility not only from the host country, but also from among their own community, depending on factors such as caste, or family groupings (*pakuti* meaning a subdivision within a caste, such as the *Vellala*'s who have many), class, regional difference and educational/professional background. Over 200,000 Tamils left for Europe, the USA and Canada in successive waves starting after the riots in 1958; 110,000 also fled to India, many living in refugee camps: they are still fearful of returning until peace is assured. 1,116,000 people from all ethnic groups have had to leave their homes according to the National Peace Council (2003). Migration away from the north is a continued desire as many young people feel that positive changes in the north have not been forthcoming and opportunities are better elsewhere, particularly now there is greater freedom to move around. This includes those from mixed social backgrounds; some hope to go abroad to continue their studies and eventually pursue careers; some do find work in countries such as Saudi Arabia as labourers or housemaids, where their absence from home has had

social and economic repercussions^{xxx}. Increasingly restrictive immigration laws in the west make the possibility of moving abroad more difficult however.

Maintaining contact with families who are dispersed is difficult and rarely do opportunities arise when they can all assemble altogether: one relative may attend a funeral, whilst another will come later for the thirty-first day ceremony, and so on. Many significant life events are recorded on video and then sent to the scattered families to be commented on, or scrutinised as the only method available to monitor the well being of distant family members. One such video I watched with a Jaffna family, showed the marriage ceremony in Switzerland of the wife's sister's daughter. It was poignant to see how changes in appearance and circumstances were keenly noted through the sight of long absent siblings and their growing, but unfamiliar children – many seen for the first time on video. Their perceptions of their once close kin had to be altered and adjusted in order to accommodate this new information and what had begun in cheerful and noisy anticipation at seeing their relatives, ended in quiet reflection: their losses were recognised and to some extent, mourned.

There are increasing numbers of people living in Jaffna without the support of family members: single women - widowed or unmarried, or the elderly. They feel vulnerable in this dislocated and fractured community, with worries about finances and coping with infirmity in the future. This is problematic in a society unused to managing the social effects of isolation and personal frailty in the absence of extended family, and where there are few homes or organised care services to undertake the task^{xxxi}. There is also greater pressure to care for relatives among much smaller family units where there is limited access to economic resources; many are at the same time trying to adjust to the loss of a key member or members, of the family. For example, a daughter may find herself having to care for younger siblings, manage the home and in some instances, a job. At the same time she must adjust her life expectations that would once have included education, marriage, children and some degree of security. There are numerous Children's Homes run by Catholic and Hindu charitable organisations, and the LTTE that are usually sponsored through donations from Tamils living abroad. There are thousands of orphans throughout the north and east, but few street children; instead they are either taken in by extended family members or sent to these homes – including children who

have a parent or parents. Economic hardship and high levels of familial disturbance have resulted in children being brought to these institutions in the belief that they will be better cared for, and consequently have better chances later in life. This is despite the infrequent contact they will have with each other thereafter, and speaks powerfully for the levels of hardship that are being suffered by these families.

There is a dramatic increase in women-headed households in the north: in Jaffna alone there are 18,000 widows (National Peace Council, 2003); these figures do not include the many women whose husbands are missing or those separated or divorced.^{xxxii} Many live in overcrowded housing or refugee settlements or 'colonies', where privacy is almost non-existent. The risk of physical and sexual abuse is high in these cramped settlements, particularly where women are perceived as "available" (Thiruchandran, 1999:58)) through either single or widowed status (de Alwis and Hyndman, 2002). Although not prohibited, remarriage is very unusual among the Sri Lankan Tamils; there are however, increased incidences of couples co-habiting rather than re-marrying, which has led to difficulties for their offspring: unmarried couples or single mothers cannot register a newborn child without a marriage certificate. These children in later years should they wish to marry, will be unable to do so without a birth certificate; many discover their parents never married only at this juncture. Single women have consequently become the unwanted and unwarranted recipients of gossip: their sexuality is perceived as contentious and threatening; their behaviour is open to scrutiny and disapproval and they are also targets for men who believe they are legitimate objects for sexually inappropriate language and behaviour.

Social tensions have developed among the fishing community, due mainly to the restrictions and limitations imposed on their working hours; once at sea for long hours, they are now at home for extensive periods, with no occupation but the worry of supporting their family financially. Overall, there are higher levels of unemployment, as anticipated job opportunities have not materialised; there is frustration and anger among many of those eager to work. Yet others have rejected employment in once respected occupations such as teaching; this is now perceived as "too soft" for some of the younger men in this social milieu of war where physical strength, hardiness and heroism are prized over altruism and benevolence.

In the case of returnees, those few Tamils who are returning to live in the north are predominantly older retired couples who did not easily settle abroad. Most missed the connection to their local temple and had stronger ties to a more positive image of national identity than their younger counterparts. There are also those whose children have reached independence, which enables them to return and make some contribution to their community. They maintained a close bond with their home in Jaffna, but this is not always shared with their children whose knowledge and understanding of Tamil society and culture is less rooted in the physical place, and instead influenced by western mores. Hence there is a greater willingness among younger Tamils to either make visits only, or settle in cosmopolitan Colombo rather than rural, isolated Jaffna. Some who have returned report difficulties in readjusting to life and are sometimes viewed with censure by the local population who suspect and fear that they may have been inculcated with values that might have an adverse impact on local Tamil society. It is naturally felt by some who remained throughout the war, that their suffering cannot be comprehended or imagined by their relatives or other outsiders. So rather than being unequivocally welcomed, there is a wariness at times towards returning Tamils or visiting foreigners. Re-acculturation for those wishing to settle back after a long absence is problematic and some have already moved out again; visiting is greeted with joy and pleasure at re-acquaintance, but to move back permanently is more complex – particularly in a setting that remains volatile and uncertain.

Women's experience

Much of this thesis appears on the surface to be about the experiences of men. However, it is grounded in, and informed by the conversations and the time spent with women. It is mostly women who have helped and been involved in my attempts at understanding the nature of experiences of war, conflict and silence. They have a central role in social and cultural life, albeit it one without great ostentation, but it must not be assumed that they have no opinion on the state of their fellow citizens or influence on the social and economic aspects of life in Jaffna; quite the contrary. Women have recently had to take on more active roles not only in familial and social spheres, but also through their work

and in their political engagement: for example a recently elected member of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is female. Sri Lankan women have had key positions within the government for many years, but it is only within recent times that they have risen to such prominence as the sole wage earners for the family through the absence of the men. They have become increasingly skilled at providing for their families, utilising both old and new resources of resilience and courage.

Young women in the north have very complex and varied lives depending largely on their social and economic circumstances. Some maintain a more 'traditional' outlook in both their appearance and behaviour; some have sought greater independence through education, jobs and through their new found single status, whilst others have joined the LTTE. This newly acquired singleness comes in the wake of thousands of males exiled from Sri Lanka, or killed in the war. Many women state that they have had to survive and cope with great terror, threat and humiliation and huge numbers - 18,000 on the peninsula alone - live with the added responsibilities of single parenthood and economic pressures. Despite increased aggression towards them from outside and the loss of many expectations from life, there is a sense of commitment to their new found authority – some Jaffna women seemed to be surviving and coping with their situations with the support of projects aimed at increasing their practical skills. Many have formed themselves into self-supporting community groups. Their success is in part due to the focus on women's health and well-being from the various NGOs, which has been effective on the whole. For the men, especially the youths, there was greater sense of isolation and bewilderment about lost roles and work and there were fewer opportunities for them within the aid projects: they were also said to be difficult to engage.

Naturally some women have been overwhelmed by their experiences of war and loss; there are escalating levels of alcoholism among the female population, suicide rates are still high and incidences of pregnancies among unmarried women has risen.

There are some fears expressed about changes in younger women however, that focus on their potential for risk and chaotic behaviour. Concerns regarding inappropriateness of dress, language, increased sexual activity and pregnancies among unmarried women are commented on. Young women are scrutinised for negative changes in their social behaviour and clothing; fears abound of their potential for bringing shame and disgrace.

They are considered vulnerable to outside influence, fears which have arisen as a result of fewer controls and boundaries with the absence of village community elders monitoring them, or suitable male relatives in a position of positive influence on young women. Returning young Tamil women with short hair, western attire superficially have little in common with their more traditional sisters, but there is a desire to establish friendships and some curiosity about life-styles. Many young Tamil women express a desire to marry 'out' to Tamil men from abroad. They make fewer dowry demands, are said to be less aggressive than the local young men, and it is assumed they have good jobs – and there are more of them.

After seven o'clock in the evening, the streets of Jaffna are devoid of women. The streets are inhospitable with no or poor street lighting, and shadows with small bands of youths standing around are intimidating. All the young women I spoke to^{xxxiii} stated unanimously and clearly that they stayed indoors after dark because of their fears of the local youths. They felt unsafe and would not go out unless in a large group or with known, older males. Even this has been undermined recently after an incident in which a father was beaten up and his daughter sexually assaulted early one evening – in a relatively small town this story spread rapidly, confirming everyone's worst fears. Stories of women living alone having their throats cut by thieves breaking into their homes to steal their jewels, were pervasive and tapped into a female psyche that saw menace and violence emerging from their often lonely, isolated and deeply unfamiliar state. This fear then spread to include many of the female international aid workers following numerous incidences of sexual molestation and physical assault by local youths and lead to a self-imposed curfew amongst all women.

In contrast, stories abounded of the days when even in the pitch dark, it was safe to walk the streets late at night due to the protection of the LTTE, who would patrol around the clock. When I asked a young female interviewee about reasons for the current violence, she stated that it arose from the growing number of unmarried women in the society who were now beyond the expected age for marriage. Also, the absence or unsuitability of local men and the demands of high dowries were again given as a cause. Others blamed easy access to violent videos and pornography, which previously unavailable were now flooding into the peninsula.

The extent of women's fears concerning safety could be seen in their responses to punishment and could sometimes appear paradoxical: an incident occurred locally when the body of a youth was discovered in the street, shot by the LTTE and a note pinned to his chest outlining his crimes many of which were towards women. A group of women with whom I was sitting greeted this with a shrug, and the brutality of the act was vindicated with: *"he had been warned three times"*. Whereas, offensive remarks randomly and regularly made by boys on the street: *"kudamel pesuverkal"*, were cause for openly expressed outrage and shock. Perhaps as a consequence of the above mentioned fears, this can be understood and explained by women's urgent desire for protection, order and stability: someone had taken and maintained control, enforcing retribution for crimes committed. Whereas other 'lesser' crimes went unpunished by the local police, leaving women vulnerable to shame, humiliation and threat. It was also perhaps an indication of the fearsomeness of the LTTE; it was rare to hear any criticism of their actions, especially from women who keenly feel the need for their protection perhaps, and as a result there is much ambivalence towards them. Occasionally it is admitted that they have *"maybe gone a little too far"* or are *"a little too strong"*. There is less ambiguity in expressing shock at rude words, rather than the murder of a petty criminal, carried out by one's protectors. I had been told early during my fieldwork that Tamil people before the war, had reacted with shock and revulsion: *"...at the mere sight of blood, but now they see bodies piled in the street and just walk over to the other side of the road"*; maybe dead bodies on the street are also more familiar than rude words nowadays. Besides this, the LTTE comprise not strangers, but sons, daughters, brothers, fathers and friends to whom there is both attachment and loyalty; however cruel their actions and methods may become.

The hospital psychiatric clinic had many referrals of young people who had attempted suicide. Superficially, they appeared to be the result of petty quarrels and seemingly trivial domestic disputes, however on closer examination they occurred in the context of years of violence, deprivation and loss. They were a catalyst for the greater betrayals of cruelty and pain experienced over decades. These acts were a summation of the long-term, chronic abuse taking place in households where young women had been bearing the brunt of sustaining the family, including numerous siblings, coping with the alcoholism

and grief of a bereaved parent, having to support themselves and their families financially, or themselves surviving sexual abuse and exploitation.

There is generally little social contact between male and female youths - working relationships are often jocular and cordial, but not expected to extend much beyond the work place; reciprocal home visits between unmarried males and females is rare. Friendships of the same gender are considered more appropriate. The bond of friendship is clearly differentiated from marital ties and can on the surface, appear stronger; both sexes tend to spend more time in the company of their friends than their spouses. Unmarried, mixed couples seen on the street together are frowned upon for their impropriety, and in the past would have been chastised by the local elders responsible for upholding social norms. As a foreigner, I lay somewhat outside these gendered relations and consequently could move fairly freely between both groups as well as have the good fortune in receiving invitations into Tamil homes, where I could participate in celebrations and propitious events not generally open to unmarried, Tamil females.

Native soil: transformations of home

The first phase of the day, which begins while it is still pitch-dark is a time of industriousness: the slightly cooler air in the morning allows the more strenuous household tasks to be carried out before the heat rises towards midday. The sound of the heavy, wooden pestle being dropped into its wooden mortar pounding the day's rice, the rasping of a large stone cylinder grinding spices on a sturdy granite block, echo out across the vicinity. Also, the early morning sweep of the palmyra *thudaippam* (broom) across the sandy coloured soil raking leaves and discarded rubbish from the ground: these domestic rhythms form a soundscape that provides continuity within the semi-urban neighbourhood, where houses are largely invisible, but adjacent, open and easily accessible to sound. These are reflected across the distance from neighbouring houses in the vicinity, and any disruption registers among the wary residents who do not encourage personal intrusion or even neighbourly banter. This is a method of communication that does not require human vocal interaction, but these rhythms act as a pulse monitoring the

well being of the neighbourhood and any distortion or change sends out an alert. During the war, attacks frequently infiltrated the actual living spaces of Tamil civilians, as opposed to being confined to delineated battlegrounds; militants and military alike would be spread throughout the vicinity, moving through the gardens and from house to house. Terrified families would be interrogated or arrested to ascertain their knowledge of the whereabouts of suspects, and therefore possessing knowledge and articulating it became a threatening and dangerous enterprise. Silence and ignorance were preferable and safer.

Argenti-Pillen (2002) in an analysis of soundscapes from southern Sri Lanka, describes the porosity of structural space to sound. Efforts to protect physical and visual space still leave the house occupants open to the intrusion of sound, which has the power to frighten and create illness. Cleansing rituals erect word-sound barriers of safety, to rid the inhabitants of their fears. In Jaffna acoustic space is frequently transgressed by intrusive and at times menacing sounds. Public address systems erected throughout the locality during the many festivals and anniversaries transmit LTTE political dogma and martial songs that enable messages and proclamations to reach inside and fill internal space. The pervasiveness of these sounds means that indoors, one finds oneself humming along to songs or distractedly unable to pursue or concentrate on conversations, because of half listening to the content of a speech being broadcast over the tannoy, which often persist until the early hours of the morning.

The invasiveness of alarming sounds in Jaffna during the war, seems to have either blunted people to loud sounds or lead them to react with distress and fear – including the local dogs who cower away from noise in an extreme and pathetic manner. When a loud noise was heard I would react and be told: “Oh don’t worry it’s not a gun”. Identification of sounds as well as weaponry is a skill acquired during wartime. At New Year time, fire crackers are let off making sounds like gun fire, sufficient to stretch ones nerve, often interspersed and almost impossible to differentiate, with the sound of real gunfire – used as an opportunity to let off a round of bullets by the army soldiers. Speech levels also fluctuate according to changes in conversational content: politically sensitive subjects are spoken of in hushed tones even within the house. Fears of being overheard seem to have transgressed what might be considered privileged space. Levels increase when affirmations of local political ideologies are being made, as though some invisible

interlocutor were present to witness and commend their support and validation. Outdoors the faceless voices of the SLA soldiers, sitting in their bunkers at every crossroads where they monitor passing traffic, call out and remind one of their presence. Silence and noise were coreferential: dissentful silence drowned out by strident and deafening propaganda. Visual space is also commandeered with the erection of large video screens during festival time, playing LTTE battle videos; demonstrations are regularly staged and schools send their pupils to wave banners and the yellow and red flags of the LTTE are hung to mark the frequent ceremonies and memorials honouring martyred cadres and other significant anniversaries. The ubiquitous and imaginative LTTE posters are regularly removed by the SLA, but there are always frayed remnants to be seen on crumbling sections of wall. The more overt conquest of open space is often near religious sites, to the consternation of those who wish politics and religion to be kept separate. Added to this, the multitudinous warning signs and heavily armed military presence on the peninsula act as constant and persistent reminders that there is not yet peace or liberty for the inhabitants of the north.

The art of self-presentation delineates not only internal from external spheres^{xxxiv}, but also relates to safety and fears of pollution. Presentation of the self, which requires fairly substantial effort and preparation, is an attempt to minimise exposure to contamination, judgement and gossip. The war led to the transgression not only of visual and acoustic boundaries, internal and external space, but also of people. The body was repeatedly breached, polluted and violated through the frequent raids and cordon-and-search operations during the war, when both property and person came under attack. This violation of privileged space continues to be a reality: drawing unnecessary attention must be avoided in order to elude scrutiny and any sign of dissonance from the prevailing social, and in this instance closely associated political discourse.

Clothing is stylised according not only to convention or as an identification of caste and class, but also as a means of protection; by formalising one's attire this creates an even tighter boundary between the self and the outside: a second skin if you will. Guarding one's appearance through conformity acts as a barrier against unwanted scrutiny and risk. Attire suitable for wearing at home is seldom worn outdoors for example; even a short trip to the local shop necessitates a change of clothes. Attention is given to jewellery –

especially gold, which is highly valued and denotes prosperity^{xxxv}, but also ensures financial security in times of upheaval. Outdoors, western attire is worn by men employed in white-collar jobs, and indoors a checked *saram* (similar to a dhoti), whereas agricultural workers, building labourers and fishermen wear a checked *saram* for work, but western attire outside work. The white *verti* is worn universally to the temple. The *kunkuma* or red *pottu* (dot) is applied to the forehead of married women and the small brown *pottu* for unmarried girls: they identify not only marital status, but also protect against evil by covering the third eye - a known vulnerable entry point. *Vibuthi* (holy ash) is drawn across the forehead in a horizontal line denoting devotion to Siva. Finally, the application of a white face powder completes preparation for the outside world: mostly it is middle class and/or *Vellala* men, women and children who use this powder.

Tamils have been inculcated with the notion that fairer skin is deemed preferable to darker skin and advertising advocates an image of 'fairness' that is not only desirable but essential to success in life, particularly in finding a suitable husband or wife and references to skin colour are constant, widespread and pervasive. All new *Vellala* brides are given a tin of white face powder along with the new wedding sari: other castes/classes are less likely to use or be provided with whitening powder. Superficially, fair skin was professed to be desirable and was openly commented on as an asset, but these distinctions of skin tone caused much personal anguish and a loss of self-esteem particularly for women and children. Frequent comparisons are made between skin colour which is considered "too dark" and contrasted with skin that is "fair and lovely" (the brand name of a particular soap and cosmetic range, manufactured in India and sold across the southern world). This is a remaining prejudice from western colonialism, when fair skin was equated with the possession of power, high status and advantage, and seems to be a continuing legacy that is detrimental to many. Children are bullied at school for having darker skin, and for Tamils generally it has been used as a disparaging and discriminatory term in the context of the ethnic conflict.

Gardens and houses are sheltered from the baking heat by a dense growth of trees, including the tall, majestic palmyra, plantains, margosa, coconut and jak-fruit trees. These trees and various shrubs, herbs and plants such as the *malikai* (jasmine) with its heavily scented flowers, afford protection not only from the heat but also provide food in

cooking and are used in a variety of domestic rituals and ceremonies. A typical family house (*veedu*) is a one storied building with a tiled roof and open rafters. A veranda at the front leads onto a room where guests are entertained and contains a low table and plastic or wooden chairs; behind is the family room and leading off, the bedrooms and shrine room. The kitchen is located at the far back or most recessed area and in Brahman homes often contains the shrine area.

Whereas once washing and toilet amenities were located outdoors, increasingly as homes are being rebuilt, they are constructed inside with western style facilities. Cooking also takes place either indoors or outdoors where there is more space; a moulded clay block is constructed with two semi-circular hollows in the front and top where the coconut husks are used to light a fire, and where pots can be placed. Calendars with pictures of popular deities and large framed photographs of close deceased relatives^{xxxvi} adorn the walls; often these photos display the remnant of the yellow sandalwood dot or *chandana*, on the portraits forehead; a sign of a recent death anniversary. The shrine room contains the *vilakku* (lamp), which is permanently kept alight representing the four basic precepts of Hindu life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kaama* and *moksha* and many pictures, figurines of favoured family Hindu deities and *prasaadam* baskets containing fruit, holy ash, flowers and betel leaves, brought from the temple following a special *puja*. Christian homes tend not to have a separate room for worship, but in the main living area a shrine corner is kept for icons and statuettes of the Virgin Mary and other favoured saints, as well as the Bible.

Tradesmen come to the window of the kitchen if accessible or remain on the veranda to deliver goods or collect laundry; despite changes in attitude to the caste system some ingrained aspects of behaviour remain in evidence from both castes. For example, a *dhobi* or *vannaan* (laundryman) refused to enter the house of a Christian family I was visiting, despite being welcomed and invited inside. This is gradually changing as a greater awareness of discriminatory caste attitudes prevails.

In the remoter village areas, traditional rural homes are built from wattle and thatch with a raised area at the back of the main room on which the deities are placed. Cooking is done in a separate building: a small open sided hut, usually made of sticks and thatch with a clay hob inside. Most houses throughout the peninsula have a garden (*thoddam*) for both the well and in which to grow fruit trees, herbs and keep poultry. Some have a

separate piece of land on which they grow and sell on a small-scale, plantains, tobacco, chillies or other vegetables usually to supplement their income. Older buildings have open rafters up to a tiled roof; glassless windows protected with wooden rods; the red polished earthen floors are cool underfoot and many Hindu homes apply an ornate *kolam* design in flour outside the front door every auspicious Tuesday and Friday. The garden is also where important domestic ceremonies take place - the *muruky* tree for example, which is planted in the north-east corner of the garden at the time of a family wedding, symbolises growth, continuity and permanence; the planting of seeds and saplings establish a sacred bond between house, land and people. All significant life events are celebrated through these close connections of soil, land, house, family, village, deity and cosmos. During the months of May, June and August (auspicious times for weddings^{xxxvii}), Jaffna becomes filled with the sight of wedding parties gathering outside the *kalyana mandapam* (temple wedding hall) and the sounds of the *nadeswaran* and *tavil* (wind instrument and drum) coming from within. Invitations are sent out widely and provide a much-needed social context in which friends and relatives can meet and celebrate together.

Marriages traditionally denote a union of not only the two individuals, but also the strengthening of the families concerned. They seek to perpetuate purity through compatible caste (*pakuti*) affiliation, economic status and stability, and a new set of responsibilities through the acquisition of additional family members. With the dispersal of families, these traditions are harder to uphold and sacrifices are made to many ancient customs, in order to find partners. Caste compatibility seems to be one custom that remains strong within the context of arranged marriages; other compromises may be made, but seldom that of caste purity. The impact of the war on marriage customs can be seen through the lack of available males and consequently their license to command a high dowry from the brides' family, which has made the arrangement of marriages often tense affairs. There are distraught parents unable to find husbands for their daughters, and consequently frustrated sons unable to marry until their elder sisters have been wed. Tamil males from abroad are now sought, and are themselves seeking brides in the home country. Tamils from abroad tend to have property and some money so are less likely to ask for a dowry: an attractive proposition particularly for families with more than one

daughter. This has long-term repercussions however, as it means not only losing a daughter, but also future financial and social connections that would provide support for both families will be more difficult to maintain with the newly married couple and their families living at a distance. Although contact will be maintained by telephone, visits will be rare and any grandchildren will become remote, intangible family members.

One wedding ceremony I witnessed in its entirety over a period of several months, was between a man returning to Jaffna from abroad after a fifteen - year absence to marry a local girl from one of the villages. The marriage was arranged in his absence by relatives and a contact at the local temple, who knew of an eligible bride: an educated woman in her early thirties, known to be a devout Hindu with appropriate family and caste/class affiliations. Their first contact was four days before the wedding, although photos and charts had already been examined, exchanged and his agreement was given over the phone, hers to her guardian and broker. He had been married previously but was now divorced and wished to find a local girl of conventional Hindu Tamil values who would be compatible^{xxxviii} and prepared to live in a foreign country. Marrying a divorced man is becoming increasingly acceptable in an atmosphere of concern regarding the lack of single males. The wedding, *kalyaanam*, took place after several days of rituals that involved several exchanged visits between the two families bearing food, the presentation of gifts including the *Koolai* tray with the *Thaali* made from melted gold (made at the *ponerinkal* ceremony) and the wedding sari. It also provided an opportunity for the bride and groom to spend time together before the wedding, as well as an opportunity for the two families to acquaint themselves.

On the day of the wedding itself, a ritual cleansing ceremony began in the shrine room and moved to the garden, where *aruku* grass was placed on the groom's head and milk poured over; likewise for the bride in her home. 'Our' party which was relatively small, arrived in a bus hired for the occasion and was greeted by the bride's family and the inhabitants from the village, everyone wearing their finest silk saris, the men in their white and cream coloured *vertis*, the groom and the *tholan* (the bride's unmarried brother), both wearing cream and gold turbans and suits. At the entrance to the bride's parents' home a huge painted *torana* (entrance screen) had been erected and the ceremony was performed with all the required rituals, including requests for spiritual

protection and the unification of the couple as spiritual partners, before their long journey two weeks later to the UK. Greater distances are covered not only from countries abroad but also on the peninsula itself: village marriage processions used to be undertaken on foot, but as marriage partners are located further afield, the distances must now be traversed by bus or van. Alliances between the two families will consequently be more difficult to sustain, reducing the financial and social benefits brought by the marriage union. Not only will the daughter be further away from her own parents and siblings, but in many instances from her new family: mother's-in-law residing in a third country are common. She will not be present to initiate her daughter-in-law into her new family life, moving as she frequently does between countries and relatives scattered around the globe.

The alternative is to remain unmarried: among the single women I spoke to (the majority of whom were in their twenties to forties) it was the older age group who were most unhappy with their single status. Many expressed fears of impending isolation and were disillusioned about their futures. These were women who had been raised with expectations of marriage and children, and were now finding adjustment to their new circumstances difficult. Some were looking after aging parents whilst their brothers and other relatives were either living abroad, had joined the movement or been killed during the war. However, younger single women who had grown up with uncertainties about marriage and the future generally, seemed to have different expectations and were keen to obtain qualifications that would enable them to get work. They also had apprehensions about the future, but saw their security located in employment rather than marriage. These women had grown up with an awareness of the difficulties of finding a husband and also understood the inequalities of the dowry system; subsequently they expressed less inclination to marry early and instead were undertaking courses and training to ensure some financial independence and stability. But, there were also many women who did not possess opportunity or choice, whose lives were brutal and restricted and who were therefore more open to the allure of the militants offering opportunities for 'independence' within the movement, for better or worse.

Devotional practice among the Jaffna Tamils

The six temple bells that ring every morning at four, announce the first *Tiruvanandha puja* of the day, which will rouse Lord Murugan from his slumbers and awaken the spirit of devotion in worshippers attending the large Kanthaswamy temple lying in the northern outskirts of Jaffna, in what is an ancient and holy district. The deity who resides within the temple, offers protection and benefaction to all his devotees; to live beneath his gaze is a sign of particular devotion and love, although it carries the risk of incurring envy or even cynicism among those disillusioned with religion. Temple *pujas* on Tuesdays and Fridays were especially auspicious according to the Hindu calendar. The temple functions according to Saiva Agamic laws^{xxxix} and its principles of temple construction and worship; it has existed on this site since 1248, but was rebuilt in 1620 having been razed to the ground by the Portuguese. In its present form it has been in existence since 1734, additions having been constructed over the years, and now it is the largest temple on the peninsula. It has six, regular daily *pujas* and a yearly 25 day festival in August/September, attended by close to a million devotees since the cease-fire. As a temple of some affluence, there are complaints that it has become a place to be 'seen' – not in *darshan*, but as a mark of status rather than worship. Whilst this may be true of certain individuals at festival times, the majority of regular worshippers undoubtedly have serious and devoted inclinations towards their deity, Lord Murugan. The yearly festival provides a much needed opportunity not only to show devotion, but also to enjoy the various cultural programmes of traditional *Bharata Naatyam* dance and *Karnatic* music concerts that have reappeared following the cease-fire, as well as shop at the trinket stalls lining the nearby streets. This festival of devotion is reflected in other smaller, but no less important temples and churches^{xl} around the peninsula and forms a significant and much enjoyed social, as well as religious occasion.

The shrine room provides a more intimate, family forum in which to venerate particular deities. These deities are considered important members of the family, requiring as much attention, respect and care as any other member of the household and each person will give a few minutes of devotion to them, each day. Similarly in Catholic families, the chosen saint^{xli} has a place within the family and regular prayers are spoken here, as well

as at the local church. Despite the continuance of most people's devotion to both Hindu and Catholic deities and saints, there is undoubtedly some disaffection and criticism of religious institutions as a whole. Although often used as places of sanctuary where individual priests of both faiths have played key roles in supporting the Tamils, some have been critical of the absence of a senior religious authority, which could have spoken out against the atrocities committed in the north and east (Somasundaram 1998). Criticism towards the mainstream higher religious institutions does not seem to extend to the local 'folk' healers however, who appear to have retained a loyal following among individuals who seek their advice and assistance, evidenced by the large crowds who gather at their temples and home shrines every Tuesday and Friday; this audience has especially increased among the visiting Tamil diaspora community.

Catholicism in northern Sri Lanka has retained some aspects of Hindu symbolism, which continues to influence some of its practice. Its richly symbolic content incorporates elements from the two faiths without compromise and it is well known that both Catholic and Hindu communities have close ties with little open antagonism between the two. It is common to be told by Hindus that they visit churches as well as temples, and consider all divine forms to have the power to assist devotees of all faiths. Many women visit churches of the Virgin Mary in order to ask for divine intervention in problems of conception; as mentioned St. Anthony is favoured by the fishing community and both Catholic and Hindu fishermen pray to him (see photo 3.).



Photo3. Catholic shrine to the Virgin Mary

It is less common to hear of Catholics attending the Hindu temple, although friendly banter and teasing occurs when Hindus express an interest in, or visit a Catholic church. Catholicism being a monotheistic religion, unlike Hinduism where a number of deities exist for different purposes, suggests that it may be easier for Hindus to attend Catholic churches without spiritual conflict. Catholic schools in Jaffna have a good reputation and it is usual to find both Hindus and Catholics fairly evenly distributed among the pupil population. Again this does not seem to give rise to conflict or contradiction. Among younger Hindus, Christianity incurs some interest because the language used is Tamil, not Sanskrit in which few are adept; this is an attractive idea for those who wish for greater spiritual guidance and are more questioning of the role of religion in society, especially one dealing with the brutal facts of war.

The denigration of Hinduism is seen as on the whole far more damaging than any individual wishing to convert to Catholicism, but on a deeper level there is unease at the number of conversions that are taking place into the newer Christian evangelical

religions: their affluence has an appeal for the poorer sections of society, wooed by the promise of material rewards – locally referred to as “rice Christians”, as most are from the paddy farming villages. There has been a burgeoning of evangelical organised religion in the north since 1996, some of whom have very opulent premises and seem to reach quite a wide population.

The Hindu and Catholic communities tend to reside in distinct locations and villages: the fishing communities are mostly Catholic and situated along the northern shore and the east side of Jaffna. Caution needs to be taken in generalising ‘differences’ too much however: both groups live harmoniously alongside one another. This is to be observed in marriage for example, where marriage takes place with some frequency between Catholics and Hindus; it is not uncommon to find families where both faiths co-exist and ‘share the same rice pot’ (the definition once used in census reports of household composition).

Very few Muslims still reside in the north; slow to return following their banishment from the northern peninsula in 1990 by the LTTE. 15,000 Muslims in Jaffna as well as many thousands more elsewhere, were told to leave ostensibly for their own safety, but also allegedly as punishment for their lack of support for the Tamil cause. Muslims in Sri Lanka have never categorised themselves as uniquely Tamil, but are inclusive of their Muslim identity among many other ‘social formations’^{xlii}. This was irksome to the Tigers who, in an act that was to have severe repercussions far into the future concerning the concept of a ‘Tamil homeland’ ordered all Muslims to leave Jaffna, with only two hours to remove themselves and all their belongings from their homes and businesses (Hasbullah 2004). Some Muslim businessmen were held to ransom, their relatives having to pay for their release. There is no longer an LTTE Muslim representative, which is undoubtedly a barrier in creating a Tamil national identity that locates the Muslims within its homeland concept. So far there have been very few Muslims who have returned to the north, despite the cease-fire, due to an erosion of trust.

Hinduism in the north generally follows the Saiva Siddhanta precepts, which follow Saiva Agamic laws and have been considerably influenced by the teachings of Arumuga Navalar, a renowned teacher and Guru of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. Although losing some popularity more recently - largely through his views that advocate

maintainance of the caste hierarchy, he was hugely influential in combating the spread of Christianity in the north through the practices of western missionaries, who were becoming increasingly widespread, managing to convert many Hindus with the promise of fortune, and through their derogation of Hindu deities and practices. He was especially prominent in the north where he lived; he provided detailed proscriptions of Hindu practice and advice for Hindus on the maintenance of customs and rituals related to health, 'selfless service' and methods of worship – etiquette for the temple and within the home. This takes a pragmatic as well as a religious view, advocating many Hindu practices for their benefits to health: worship of Pillaiyar (also known as Ganesha) is strenuous and involves bending three times with knees flexed and ankles crossed, hands holding the ear lobes. Walking around the temple three times: *pratheshti*, sun worship, the mantra *Om* that resonates and energises the body and even practices such as *pirathattai* – rolling around the temple at festival times, are noted for their health giving properties. Placement of the *kaavadi* hooks is said to relate to acupuncture points and hence control the pain. The camphor that is burned in the temple cleanses the stale air created by people crammed together in confined space, and prevents worshippers from fainting.

Tamils from abroad have contributed to the development of both the temple and church sites. The increased affluence of religious sites is notable with the construction, renovation and expansion of many religious buildings and has provided local work, shelter, orphanages and training schemes, but in some instances they are at risk of outgrowing their congregation of local devotees. These are acts of devotion that also ensure the continued benevolent protection of the deity towards these donors, even at a distance of thousands of miles, and are an opportunity for Tamils absent during the conflict to make some positive contribution to their village.

Worship of Amman ('Mother') deities has increased over the war period: Kalamman, Mariamman, Pidariamman, Manomariamman, Nagapoosaniamman. In the conservative atmosphere of Jaffna the increase in village temple worship of the goddesses would be unusual if it were not for the war. These local deities were enlisted to help and protect their devotees; they are known for their protective qualities but also their wrath if given insufficient homage. Amman has various roles within Hindu religious practice: she is the

divine Mother or *sakti* - female energy or essence, the animating half of Siva as well as loyal wife Parvati, or the avenging female deity Kali. She is also found among the non-Agamic temples where she is worshipped as Mariamman^{xliii} bringer of smallpox, drought (*mari* meaning monsoon) and other 'hot'^{xliv} diseases if displeased. As a consequence of the war and the tsunami, fears concerning the anger of the gods and goddesses are widespread. It is to be remembered that these deities have an intimate place within all Hindu families and are felt to be a member of the household, divine but also closely connected to the world. The rise in devotion to Mariamman during the war occurred because she is understood to be a deity who despite being easily incited towards anger, also has a forgiving and protective nature and is known as a compassionate and forgiving deity - she forgives innumerable times if kept content; individuals as well as whole communities seek her help in times of trouble, but when neglected she will become angry and bring bad fortune to those who have not given sufficient attention to her. This was one explanation offered for the war in the villages and in order to appease her anger, propitiations of cooling substances are given; instances of spirit possession among female devotees also increased.

In the east, according to Lawrence (2000), Amman deities are sought for information regarding violent events and disappearances through the local oracles. She has discovered that they are able to overcome the silence that is so all encompassing of life in the eastern region of Batticaloa, where poverty exacerbates the experience of powerlessness. In the north following the tsunami, this has increased and it is said that the god of the sea – Varunan, has expressed his anger towards the people because of their lack of devotion. Worship at the non-Agamic Amman temples has increased with many more devotees in attendance and more instances of severe vows undertaken to appease these goddesses; such as *thuukkukkaavadi*, which although usually associated exclusively with Lord Murugan, now includes these other female deities who have a reputation as protective, powerful and energetic deities. Despite attempts by Hindu scholars such as Navalar to advocate adherence to Agamic laws and principles of temple worship that follow Sanskritised theological texts, non-Agamic worship continues to be popular. Perhaps not to the same extent as in the east, but there are many non-Agamic temples around the peninsula: one worthy of note is the Selva Sinnithy Murugan temple at Thondamanaru

where Lord Murugan is worshipped: the deity much beloved of *kaavadi* devotees. The temple priest; a *pujari/kurrukal* (non-Brahman priest) does not speak mantras or chants, but performs the *puja* in silence, with a cloth tied over his mouth in acknowledgement of “divinity (which) is inconceivable and inexpressible” (Neelakanthan 1998).

Veera Maranam: ‘Heroic Death’

The LTTE whilst not espousing a particular religious preference and claims to a secularised membership, many of their ceremonies have religious elements to them. Since 1990, the bodies of deceased LTTE cadres have been buried rather than cremated. This began following the brutal conflict at Elephant Pass (*Anaiyiravu*), in which hundreds died; the sheer number of cremations was too great and partially explains why this change in practice occurred. Another reason suggests that the LTTE sought to position their dead cadres nearer to the soil that they had died defending, in both a literal and metaphoric sense and have stated that the martyrs’ bodies are the seeds from which new martyrs will arise and defend Tamil land. Finally, and for more banal and prosaic reasons there was insufficient wood for the number of cremations needed. This originated the *tuyilum illam* (resting place) concept that over the years has expanded with several massive burial grounds located throughout the north and east. They are vast and desolate areas of ground with row upon row of low tombstones - *virarkkal* (some covered in blue ceramic tiles^{xlv}), reminiscent of the First World War burial grounds in northern France. The burial ground at Kopay was bombed by the SLA in the mid-nineteen nineties and many of the headstones were destroyed; their remnants are now enshrined in a glass cabinet as a graphic and explicit reminder to the Tamil people of the violence perpetrated against them.

The fallen cadres are interred as fighters, not men and women with families’ and personal stories; there is no recognition of kin ties in name - their battle pseudonym, which every cadre is given is used instead (Schalk 1997); there is no individual adornment or inscription, although some carry the *maalai* - garland, placed there by family members usually after the ceremony has passed. Ownership of the ritual is taken from the family

and becomes a public, state-based ritual albeit with the family present in silent, but honourable status; speeches are made by the Tamil Tiger leadership recalling events from the battle life of the cadre, and their heroism as fighter for the cause is affirmed.

The concept of a heaven to which the fallen cadre will go, is different to that of ordinary non-combatants. *Veera suvarrkam* denotes a special place for heroes (*maavirar*) who have died fighting for the Tamil homeland and refers to the process of giving up one's life in order to take another: especially the Black Tiger suicide cadre (*karumpupuli*). This has lead to a hierarchy among both the dead and the living; the deceased have a special and presumably superior heaven to others who have died either a natural or 'non-heroic' death.



Photo 4. LTTE cemetery

This extends to the living relatives who are given greater respect if a family member has died through his or her actions as a member of the movement during battle – but, as it was related to me, families without a martyr or relative in the movement were worse off than those who had contributed to the cause in terms of support and financial assistance, both now and continuing into the future.

It may be asked what motivates and ensures the loyalty of the LTTE cadres in the face of almost inevitable death, particularly those of the suicide bombers of the Black Tiger (*karumpupuli*) movement, willing to sacrifice their bodies for the Tamil cause? In the Islamic organisations of the Middle East, the militants have the expectation of rewards in heaven and attaining a state of bliss when they die. What recognition is there among the Tamil Tigers, comprising as it does both Hindu and Christian members? Can they be considered a religious movement? Religious underpinnings play little part in their overt ideological self-construction – neither is there an equivalent to the Islamic Jihad to be found among the Tamil fighters. What motivates and constitutes such depths of loyalty, that cadres are prepared to die either in battle, on a suicide mission or by taking their cyanide capsules? According to Dein and Littlewood (2005), hostility and persecution from outside has been a causal factor in apocalyptic suicides and although the Black Tigers (*karumpupulikal*) are not part of an apocalyptic cult or group, they undoubtedly perceive the outside world as hostile. Many apocalyptic cult members; for example the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, although speaking through religious texts, were also connected with the immediate world of their “persecutors” (2005:206); the agents of the government. Their denial of the government’s status as a legitimate authority prevented them from complying with orders to surrender; a comparatively secular position on the part of the Branch Davidians, I would surmise. This stance is similar to the one taken by the LTTE: they do not recognise the Sri Lankan government as rightful in presiding over the Tamils and therefore see themselves as lying outside their influence and jurisdiction.^{xlvi} Evidence for this lies in their establishment of a de facto separate state within their own protected territory, where they have an army, navy, police force, their own unique system of law, economic structures including their own banks and tax system; a health care system, educational and training institutions; their own national flag, and now anthem.

Despite the LTTEs denial of any religious adherence (which is accurate: they have no discriminatory practices with regard to religious conviction), there are however suggestions that their use of religious terminology and references to sacred texts from both Hinduism and Christianity, have some related significance^{xlvii}.

Schalk (1997:1) infers that the LTTE's use of religious terms, although containing some ambivalence in meaning, does in fact point to the influence of religious imagery and symbols. Examples include: sacrifice, 'death and resurrection', heroes, martyrdom, 'communion of brotherhood'. Rituals celebrating specific events are linked to concepts of martyrdom such as regularly celebrated death anniversaries. He refers to the existence of an "Office of Great Heroes" (p.1) in Jaffna, whose sole purpose is to research and identify heroic symbols that can be used within the LTTE's ideological proclamations and discourse. Schalk contends that the LTTE's utilisation of these religious revivalist concepts is in order to eliminate problems of contingency, despite their denial and self-perception as secular and rationalist. Thus, some form of 'tradition' is required in order to provide the LTTE doctrine with its fundamental purpose, and in the process deal with this problem of contingency. Religion being one of the more successful and of course familiar traditions, its imagery and language is in this instance created and marshalled together to satisfy this purpose. Schalk suggests this is especially so among ideologies facing practical extinction – such as the LTTE. Their denial of any claim to religiosity on the other hand, must be overtly articulated within the public domain in order to subvert any implications that could undermine the solidarity of the movement and alienate sections of the population. However it would appear that in order to placate all potential adherents, they have incorporated symbols and terms from Hinduism, Christianity and to a more limited extent Islam, and thereby avoided this problem. In other words, their usage of religious terms and forms of ritual practice belies their overt contention of secularity.

Their annual memorials recognising the anniversaries of dead heroes from the movement have a distinctly non-secular tone, with speeches that call on ancient myths and figures from Hindu and Christian texts and ritualistic performances. The concept of a martyrs' heaven - *veera suvarkkam*, is adapted to fit LTTE beliefs; one that recognises the higher status of the Tamil martyr. A leading northern cadre, Thileepan, when nearing death from his very public hunger strike in 1987 against the intervention of the Indian Peace Keeping

Force (IPKF), evoked heaven as a place where he would unite with the other 650 or so martyrs from the LTTE and “with the joy that is reserved for these chosen ones, (he) would look down upon the land of Tamil Eelam”^{xlviii} (Hoole et al; 1990: 165). Prabhakaran himself has become an almost iconic figure; many Tamils visit his natal home from abroad, which although a bombed out shell has become a place of pilgrimage: its walls covered by graffiti and slogans of devotion to the ‘Sun God’. It is rumoured that some collect sand from around the ruins, believing it to be sacred.

In civilian funeral ceremonies, the impact of having relatives living abroad means that those who cannot come at short notice, miss the cremation and an important opportunity to mourn. Mourning is a long process however, that involves different stages over many days and months of adjustment, including ritual farewells, special food offerings and the final disposal of the ashes in a sacred river or sea. A ceremony takes place after thirty-one days during which the bereaved are unable to attend the temple, receive outside visitors in their home - apart from relatives and close neighbours who cook each day, until the ceremony itself. After one year, there is another ritual ceremony in the home with a priest who performs a *pūja* similar to the one in the temple, which is attended by relatives and close friends. At one time the cremation took place within twenty-four hours, but now the body is often embalmed so relatives are able to come from a distance but even so, seldom does every member of the family attend every stage. Mourning practices, like so much else, have had to be adapted and accommodated within an atmosphere of continuous loss and change.

Caste and class: old categorisations, new social hierarchies

Among the Jaffna Tamils both in the peninsula and abroad, caste divisions are to an extent diminished, in large measure due to the effects of the war that threw people together in refugee camps following displacement of caste based villages. Condemnation from the LTTE had also driven open references to caste underground and the prevailing rhetoric claimed it was greatly weakened. But I could not ignore the frequent references to caste differentiation - albeit whispered in a similar tone to that used when referring to

sensitive political issues, which lead me to believe that in many respects it still held sway over Tamil religious, social and political life. The caste system, as in India, was largely a construction of colonialism; in Sri Lanka this arose during the period of Dutch rule through economic endeavours to assist the *Vellalars* with cultivation of the lucrative tobacco plantations (Pfaffenberger 1990). Most would acknowledge that it still held some considerable influence over matters of marriage and relationships at work, where there was a reversal of caste status whereby members of the dominant castes have increasingly found themselves in subordinate positions within the work place. It was also claimed that the caste system did not exist within the Catholic community, but this was disputed by some: assumptions were often made based on name, location and job; for example all the Catholic bishops in the Tamil areas are said to come from a known high caste group on one of the islands. This was evident in matters of promotion or invitations to weddings that could no longer be refused on grounds of maintaining caste purity. Despite great efforts to eliminate the caste system, some people spoke of its resurgence in the cease-fire period. This was acknowledged to me from differing caste groups - mentioned guardedly, as to openly define and identify people by caste would incur the wrath not only of those discriminated against, but also that of the Tamil Tigers, who are quick and eager to stamp out discrimination through public humiliation and punishment of offenders.

I encountered a 'toddy tapper' (*Nalavar* or 'climber' caste, unique to Jaffna) collecting the *kallu* sap in his earthenware *mutti* pot before descending by rope: the *naar* is a looped piece of Palmyra rope used to aid ascent and descent of the palmyra tree. After our conversation and before leaving, I asked if I could take his picture as he was wearing and carrying all the tools of his trade, he however politely refused, stating that he did not want his name and picture to appear in published form as his son was now employed in a respectable administrative position and his colleagues might discover his caste origins. One anecdote described how a family who had given a glass cup to a member of the *Pallar* (labouring) caste who was working in their home (glass cups being reserved for labourers or for indeterminate and unwitting anthropologists) was reported to the local Tamil Tigers. They visited the home of the offenders, also inviting the aggrieved man and his family to attend. The 'hosts' had to provide food and drink from their best drinking and eating vessels, whilst everyone engaged in polite conversation, but understanding the

cause and nature of the punishment. This was a form of symbolic inversion denoting a reversal of social propriety, similar to that described by Scott (1990:172). Similarly, during the French Revolution the defeated noblemen served the avenging “commissaires”, as an act of humiliation and retribution for all the previous acts of oppression.

Those who seemed to feel most comfortable talking about unequal treatment in relation to matters of caste were younger school students from the remoter villages, who often complained of discrimination by teachers and said they were held back in class as a result, leading to disadvantages in going on to further education. But in the burgeoning atmosphere of ‘child rights’ instilled through some of the aid organisations, this had created a similar form of symbolic inversion whereby children in contact with these agencies possessed considerable knowledge, and therefore power over their teachers. Some parents also complained that this knowledge concerning ‘rights’ meant they were unable to oppose their children’s wishes within the home and were under the threat of being reported to the authorities. Getting children to leave school and work in the fields was now more difficult, but also threats to join the militants was a potent method in undermining parental authority. There are repercussions as families struggle to understand each other, with parents often ignorant of the new political and legal agenda and language.

Anti-caste movements in Jaffna go back to British colonial times and involve debates of ‘Aryan’ versus ‘Dravidian’^{xlix} origins, and are hence highly contentious. For the purposes of this study, I shall describe the movements of the 1930s onwards, when the struggle against the caste system was being played out contemporaneously with the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. It is also worth noting the impact of Arumugar Navalar, who as well as reinvigorating Hinduism in the face of Christian proselytising, did more than anyone to enforce rules of birth, aimed at segregating Tamils and establishing the caste system firmly within Jaffna Tamil society. He advocated that as well as forbidding certain castes from taking water from public wells and worshipping inside the temples, children were forbidden education and perhaps most draconian were the restrictions placed on women: they were forbidden to wear the sari blouse and shoes, jewellery, the *pottu* or the wedding *thaali*. Although these regulations died out in the mid-

twentieth century, it is suggested that there are still some rare instances of temples forbidding entry to subordinate castes (Muttucumaraswamy, 1965).

In 1931, the Donoughmore Commission sought to give voting rights to the subordinate castes and although Tamils from the dominant castes contested this, they were unsuccessful. Despite this, the situation of most oppressed castes remained one of subjugation and segregation. In 1943 the 'Northern Sri Lankan Minority Tamils Mahasabha' became the 'All Sri Lanka Minority Tamils Mahasabha' in acknowledgment of the plantation Tamils of the hill country and whilst the Tamil Congress was largely against increasing the rights of the Dalits, as the oppressed castes were known, the UNP were more supportive and campaigned to abolish 'untouchability'. The advent of the newly formed Tamilarasu in 1956 sought to unify all groups arguing for equality but this was largely rhetorical and there was not much evidence of change at practice level. This was despite the 1957 'Prevention of Social Discrimination Act', which was supposed to outlaw caste-based discrimination in public places. In 1958 the "temple entry movement" was petitioned by the Minority Tamils Mahasabha; not to be outdone Tamilarasu called for an "annihilation of Untouchability week" that resulted in some schools being established for Dalit children. In 1964 the communists quit the UNP, and the Tamilarasu took their place. The communists now acting independently started the temple entry movement, demanding access to land and public wells; the Tamilarasu protested against this movement and gained a reputation as remote, Colombo based, higher caste Tamils out of touch with local politics and issues, who consequently lost support in the north.

One of the most aggressive episodes of caste discrimination took place at a well known Murugan temple in what is now a high security zone in the north of the Jaffna peninsula. Pfaffenberger (1990) has provided an analysis of how the responses to this event shaped the future course of a "defensive ethnic nationalism" (p.78) that had learnt to direct attention away from resolving internal conflicts. He suggests its avoidance, by leaving conflicts unresolved only opens the door to militancy and political extremism. Following the riots of 1983, the anti-caste movement was suppressed in the north because of fears that any apparent internal dissent would be damaging to the claims of a unified and cohesive Tamil society. Consequently the LTTE have been instrumental in addressing some of the needs of the oppressed castes through their desire to abolish any

discriminatory practices that would foster resentment and damage the ideal of a united Tamil Nation - after all, they needed everyone's cooperation and support in order to maintain a cohesive fighting force inclusive of all castes, classes and religions (Ravikumar, 2002). But, anyone writing against caste discrimination was paradoxically seen as anti-nationalist and an enemy of the Tamil nation; internal strife was to be dealt with internally, not in the public sphere.

Over subsequent decades, many thousands of high caste, middle-class *Vellalas*¹ left the country (as in previous years, searching greater opportunities as well as safety following Sinhalese political chauvinism). Initially the majority of the LTTE cadres came from the *Vellala*, but through a combination of flight abroad and disillusionment with the movement they were replaced with those from among the other castes. During the war the population was often thrown together in adversity, breaking many caste boundaries and resulting in a loosening of the rigid pre-war structures. However, there are fears that these may be returning in the post-war climate: increased complaints of discrimination have been reported according to NGOs working among the remoter village communities and there are also increases in caste-based gang fights. Concrete changes to legislation have yet to be instituted; so far no improvement in equal rights has been instituted and abroad it is said that caste rules are also still enforced (Ravikumar 2002). Road names still exist in Jaffna denoting caste communities and the ritual specialist roles of the barber (*Ambadan*) and washerman (*Vannaan*) remain. In their ceremonial roles as officiators at funerals and weddings, they are jointly referred to as *kudimakkal*. Recently, the LTTE have actively sought to forbid both the washerman and barber from visiting the homes of clients, and instead to open up their own shops.

In terms of the current caste groups in Jaffna, the *Brahmans* are relatively few (0.7%) and they do not hold an especially dominant role in the north of Sri Lanka unlike in southern India and are usually under the patronage of the *Vellala* temple administrators. They migrated to the peninsula relatively recently; most work as temple priests and are said to be "exclusive in their habits and seldom marry outside their caste" (W.H Tambiah 2001). *Brahmans* are referred to as "honourable beggars", a local aphorism that suggests dependence on their *Vellala* employers, but at the same time recognises their religious authority and expertise in Sanskrit and temple ritual. Due to the fleeing of many

Brahmans during the war, temple officiators are no longer exclusively Brahman; there are also a number of *Saiva Kurukkal* who hold similar roles and functions but are also able to preside over funerals, unlike the ritually 'purer' Brahman priests.

The *Vellala's* are the main caste group in the Jaffna peninsula. They are mostly agriculturalists and traders, their title comes from the word '*Vellanmai*' meaning cultivation or tillage; they comprise approximately 50% of the population. They also include: cultivators, chieftains, temple patrons who provide money for temple construction and maintenance of temple Brahman priests. Sacred power is conferred on them as owners of the temple and their importance is demonstrated after the *puja* ceremony by *prastaatam* (consecrated offerings), which are often distributed to the worshippers by the *Vellala* owners (Saveri 1996). They were known in ancient times as 'Lords of the Clouds' or 'Lords of the Flood', referring to their skills in both controlling and storing water used for agricultural purposes (W.H Tambiah 2001).

The *Karayars* form the fisher caste, known for their hardiness. Many of the original leaders in the LTTE including their leader Prabhakaran are said to be from this caste and originate from the northern coastal community near Velvetturai. *Chiviars* were once palanquin bearers and now work in shops and businesses. The *Kusavas* make up the potter caste and are still involved in the manufacture of earthenware. The *Iddamponne Koviars* were once servants of the *Vellala*, but following emancipation they now follow different professions. Among the subordinate castes, the *Nalavars*, *Pallars*, *Parayars* and *Turumbas* form the largest groups: referred to locally in somewhat derogatory fashion as "toddy tappers", "coolies", plus the funeral drummers and washermen of the *Nalavars* respectively.

Some would say that caste has been overshadowed by an increase in class consciousness, made more pertinent since the exodus of so many of the different caste groups abroad and their acculturation into the social systems of the west and their accumulated wealth. With changes in power relations and economic status, class and caste barriers are shifting with less certainty as to which is caste and which is now class discrimination.

Vigilance and protection: living with the times

In the north, there were varied symbols of protection from curses, evil eye and misfortune. Grotesque masks on the fronts of houses protected both building and occupants from evil eye; effigies made of straw and dressed in clothes were placed on the scaffolding of houses being newly constructed; multitudinous small road-side shrines to the various deities; margosa leaves adorning the doorways of some houses to protect against evil (margosa is also known as the “abode of *Amma*”^{li}; Nabakov, 2000:36), and the near universal wearing of the *nul* thread on the wrist as protection against bad luck. Curses and fears are taken seriously and managed through a variety of techniques: tales abound of both fortune and mostly misfortune, and how to avoid it, or what to do if you have it.

Rebuilding of houses that have been destroyed to the foundations pose difficulties in this era of wide-scale destruction; if rebuilt, both house and occupants would be living under a portent of bad luck. If it sustains limited and reparable damage, it can be renovated and become safely habitable again. Each house has its own horoscope: an astrologer reads the birth charts of all the occupants to ascertain their compatibility and then offers advice concerning its good and bad aspects, including ways to ward off misfortune. For example, in one house the clay cooker was situated directly below a water tank on the roof, it was considered a harbinger of bad luck because of the mix of hot and cold elements. It was said that lighting a fire in the inner kitchen would be inadvisable and therefore recommendations were made that all cooking should take place outdoors. It is essential that family and home are compatible as ill fortune occurs when horoscopes are ignored: a teacher, who rebuilt his house from the foundations up after it was destroyed by bombing disbelieved notions of harm, but when he lost his job and his son performed badly in exams, his neighbours blamed him for ignoring the horoscope reading. Ill health and unexpected death have been cited as other consequences of ignoring horoscopes, or offending deities through lack of proper devotion or losing/selling/renewing the wedding *thaali*. The positioning of a large Krishna temple with the highest *gopura* in southern India, is said to cast a malevolent shadow over Sri Lanka and has been blamed for the more devastating losses incurred through the war.

Within the home there is the potential to both pollute and fall victim to the chaotic forces of bad luck and evil eye. The consequences of irresponsible behaviour can result in damage to health or bring bad luck on oneself and those in the vicinity. Indulging in certain types of behaviour when ill can result in exacerbation of the problem and are monitored closely within most families: eating *palaappalam* (jak fruit) with wet hair (unless this applied to myself in which case because I was “*vitthiaasam*” - ‘different’, it was therefore permitted); after visiting a family who had suffered a bereavement a ‘full bath’ (head to toe) was necessitated before one could enter the house, and on the first day of menstruation entry into the home was also forbidden until after bathing. The shrine room and the temple are also out of bounds for five days as was handling religious artefacts and applying *vibuthi*. Following concepts from Ayurvedic medicine that classify ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ foods according to particular health conditions and moods, certain foods were to be avoided during episodes of illness. Forbidden foods comprised: plantains, mangos and onions during a cold; *pepoe* (papaya) and rice with a fever, and pineapples are to be avoided while menstruating to avoid stomach cramps. All these are aimed at sustaining a balanced system. Food is never taken from ‘outside’ unless its origins are clear – exceptions being most weddings - as purity is always questioned; on all long journeys home-cooked food was generally eaten, apart from hot or bottled drinks. Home remedies were tried before resorting to western medicine as this was often considered to make conditions worse, although antibiotics were acceptable and seen as helpful in a variety of sicknesses – even when the entire course was not taken.

Some businessmen ask their wives to check the road outside before leaving the house on particularly significant days in case there were any inauspicious signs that could damage important business transactions. The sight of Brahmans, widows, ‘barren women’, bald-headed men or people with “*oily hair or oil sellers*” could all bring misfortune. Geckos are another source of potential risk; their tone and location being significant - a long drawn out chirrup is bad news, but a short one is safer, if they are crouched on the ceiling or under the door arch they are omens of good, but not when sitting on the wall. In order to ward off any ill-luck, tapping on wood the same number of times as the gecko chirrups will avoid misfortune; if there is any uncertainty a visit to the astrologer with the day and time of when the incident occurred, can provide information as to whether this was

auspicious or not. House building, marriage, birth, puberty and death are all times when people are considered to be especially vulnerable to malevolent agents and therefore in need of the protection of the gods.

As would be expected, during the war many people took greater precautions against curses, evil eye and inauspiciousness: tying of the *nul* thread on the wrist had increased over the war years even among those who had previously professed some scepticism, but now almost everyone wore one or several, for protection. One family who had been displaced every five years since 1990 and believed this would continue, notwithstanding the current cease-fire (which was believed by many to be temporary), gave special significance to the equal number of years in between their displacements. New-borns were given names associated with instruments of war: 'Bombasi' (bomb), 'Helissa' (helicopter) in the hope that this would offer some protection. Both the LTTE leadership and the President of Sri Lanka are said to have taken note of astrologically auspicious days to predict the likely outcome of battles and major political decisions regarding social change. Whilst there is some surface denial, especially by educated and westernised Tamils regarding these ideas, at a deeper level they are adhered to and provide explanations and remedies against outside destructive forces.

There is a recognition and acknowledgment of the role of cosmology, religion and metaphysics that has both explanatory and active remedial elements that are neither static nor universal, but rather adaptive, transformative and applied depending on individual and/or collective need and circumstance. In the north, some state that religion has to some degree helped sustain them during periods of adversity, and they have found solace in particular ritual practices that play a pivotal role in their lives; others less so.

The cheerful insubordination of the young temple festival devotees at the water cutting ceremony (*theetham*) is in sharp contrast to the violence of the gang fights taking place outside, after dark. During the *theetham* ceremony there is an unstated position held by the temple managers regarding behaviour that permits a certain degree of drama and frivolity to be played out, whereby crowds of male youths hurl and throw water at each other and any other targets within their vicinity. Although it is controlled and limited, it appears to be an opportunity for the expression of joy - something that is rare in the setting of cease-fire tension. This contrasts with the violence of the youth gangs who use

more injurious weapons than water to attack one another and those who attempt to intervene. These contrasting events provide an example of sanctioned and unsanctioned releases of tension and conflict. During the festival, there are incidences of what Sales (1983) refers to as ritualised contestations of power that in fact reinforce power relations and maintain social order. Acts of insubordination have a carnivalesque quality and provide playful opportunities to challenge authority. But unsanctioned violence defies that order and results in acts of more dangerous hostility. Sanctioned insubordination permits the slow release of the cork from the bottle and contains further acts of violence, whereas unsanctioned aggression is an explosive shattering of the bottle (Sales 1983:169). The anthropological literature abounds with studies on 'rituals of rebellion' and 'symbolic inversion' including: Gluckman 1963; Babcock (ed.) 1978; Douglas 1966; Leach 1976 and Turner 1964, and literary critic Bakhtin 1968.

Adherence to some of the long held ideas concerning protection and safety are still common and in some instances have increased, but perhaps none more so than the dramatic rise in one particular form of ritual that offers protection from experiences of violence that have overwhelmed particularly the youth population. These youths have responded to the brutality into which they have been born and conditioned, finding alternative modes of expression to describe this violence. Both utilise the body and pain: one through the performance of *thuukkukaavadi*, the other through the violence of the street gang.

Chapter 5

“Frogs in a well”: fear and segregation

One Sunday, when sitting on the veranda with my first host family, a man approached, struggling up the path to the house with a large, black holdall. We had become aware of his presence by a rasping sound, as he cautiously pushed open the gate and entered. The gate is left unholed so that when visitors arrive the family are alerted to their presence through the grating noise – it seems as though every house has its own unique warning system to inform the inhabitants of the entry of strangers.

In the broiling mid-afternoon heat everyone watches him warily as he approaches, until he drops his bag at our feet and draws out a large handkerchief and wipes the sweat from his face and neck. Addressing the mother of the house he requests a drink of water and is handed a metal jug from which he drinks thirstily, not touching his lips to the rim, as is the custom. He rolls out a plastic, woven palmyra mat on the ground and proceeds to pull out a selection of saris from the top of his bag, one by one these beautiful pieces of bright cloth, still in their plastic bags are laid before us. He removes the covers so we can admire the colours, patterns and the quality of the cloth. As he does so, he idly enquires about who we all are, where from: “*entha uur?*” (“which village?”) and our occupation; these questions are answered tersely. To ease the tension, he makes several jokes which are responded to with laughter, but after he has packed up his wares and left, his ‘true’ identity is discussed in hushed but urgent tones; the assumption being that he is not who he says he is. Collective opinion is that he is probably a spy from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of the Indian secret service, checking on the family and myself. The son-in-law who was also present, had been arrested during the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) period and had been interrogated about his possible connections with the LTTE, and was especially wary. This appraisal of strangers and outsiders is routine; unknown visitors are often viewed with caution until some reassurance is provided, if possible.

When I first met this family and came to live in their house, they found my interest in Tamil puzzling and were somewhat wary at first, but also curious and eager to practice their English – despite one of the son’s ‘not liking English’ because its hegemony was criticised by the LTTE, whom he supported. This was easily overcome however, and soon we participated in each other’s everyday lives with a measure of acceptance. Outside the confines of the home environment however, it was noticeable that I was an awkward companion and it took me some time to understand this discomfort.

Often within the confines of friend’s homes there was a cheerful camaraderie and friendliness that was absent outdoors; eye contact and therefore conversation would be avoided. In my naivety in the beginning, I would assume the same level of friendliness outside as inside, but soon learnt to avoid ‘seeing’ friends, and instead keep quiet thereby avoiding unnecessary discomfort for the other person. It seemed to concern risk whereby talking in the open could provoke suspicion and be ‘heard’: there were frequent warnings of spies eaves-dropping on conversations and therefore seldom were encounters on the street acknowledged or instigated.ⁱⁱⁱ It was extremely rare to see people chatting in the street or in queues. I was once told: “Now we only open our mouths to eat and drink”. When this family moved from rented property to a newly built house of their own, I continued to visit but was now no longer a part of their intimate household and instead returned to being a visitor – sitting in the formal guest area where I would be plied with food and drink, to our mutual discomfort.

There are many and frequent power cuts in Jaffna, when house and street alike are plunged into near total darkness without warning. Every home is equipped with a ready supply of matches, candles and kerosene lamps to replace the garish electric strip lights. For eight years, the peninsula existed after dark in a twilight world of shadows and corners, creating fear (*payam*) of intruders: army, insurgents and now, criminals. Many children and young people have grown up with fears of strangers in an environment of uncertainty, intrusion and threat. Children and young people study hard; friendships take place mostly in school, but seldom cross the boundary of home where siblings are more likely to comprise their play-mates. In adulthood, regular visitors to the home are only from a small, close-knit group of trusted friends.

The sense of isolation and segregation experienced by many in Jaffna over the last twenty years was summed up through a well-known, local adage that likened themselves to “frogs in a well”. The arrival of the outside world for the long isolated residents of Jaffna, has been greeted with ambiguity: as noted there is an instilled fear and distrust of newcomers, whether Tamil or other unknown foreigners, but there is also some curiosity. However, this curiosity about the outside world comes with the risk of disloyalty and is therefore quickly subsumed and replaced by apprehensiveness. Fears surrounding the spread of pornography, violence and HIV/AIDS are blamed on exposure to the external, mostly western world; a desire for progress and better fortunes does also exist, but through the example of countries such as Singapore. Anxiety about the loss of a dynamic Tamil society and culture is frequently expressed, particularly as its preservation has been fought for with such personal hardship and loss over many years; for it now to be exposed to dissolution and degradation is saddening for many. I would surmise however, that whilst this is true to a large extent, the fear is also encouraged. Concerns regarding the intrusion, as it is often perceived, of a *western* modernity is expressed often through the risk of sexual impropriety and the formation of inappropriate relationships. These are observed and monitored closely and can easily attract open condemnation. As stated previously this is often directed towards those who represent a threat to separatism, but under the guise of fears of modernity transforming and damaging Tamil ‘traditions’: either by Tamils who have been living in the west or other foreigners. The aid workers segregate themselves, and are segregated from the community within their offices, vehicles and compounds. Other foreigners who occasionally express interest in visiting Tamil homes are greeted with some suspicion; returning Tamils are also not exempt from these segregations through rumours and expressions of disapproval regarding their ‘difference’. But, conflict arises for those Tamils who do wish for greater openness, as they can be accused of being injudicious in allowing strangers to enter their midst and disapproval is frequently voiced about propriety and safety.

Doubts about allegiances and motives have also been cast towards once trustworthy neighbours, fuelled as part of a strategy from both sides of the conflict to alienate and separate one from ‘the other’ for fear of their dissent and anger. The tentative return of many Tamils to visit a homeland at once familiar but also strange, are compounded by

encountering relatives either not seen for years, or meeting some as strangers. Both have had experiences that neither can comprehend nor easily understand: surviving in exile and/or in war. These irrevocable changes now have to be negotiated in order to rebuild relationships.

Many family homes now expand and contract to accommodate these numerous relatives visiting after absences of a decade or more; most were exiled across the globe for economic, educational and security reasons. They are now able to re-establish bonds with relatives, as well as attend the many Temple festivals held throughout the year, and check on properties that had to be abandoned many years before. Most families' small network of core, close friends now fulfil the roles of absent family members to praise, chastise, advise and console, as once the respected elder or trusted sibling would have done. These roles and relationships are created out of necessity to enable children in particular, to benefit from the advice and support of elders. There is a common bond between these friends who all share the loss of family and its subsequent isolation, as well as experiences of war: some have sons, daughters, parents or siblings living abroad or deceased, others are childless or single. As a consequence, new social structures that in many ways replicate the former conventional kinship system have developed. Outside these friendships, protection of the family from gossip, suspicion and intrusion is paramount in an atmosphere where rumour is rife - anyone fortunate enough to find themselves sharing these warm and hospitable homes, do not do so lightly.

Within Hindu homes, providing open hospitality and generosity towards those in need is seen as an important aspect of *charya* – the concept of selfless service, and as stated entry into these close-knit families is therefore a privilege. However, this could pose a dilemma; it was the subject of internal conflict for some devout families who had to contend with challenges concerning their actions and the motives of strangers. They had to rely on their understanding of the required limitations of hospitality and at the same time protect their own families from over-exposure to the potentially damaging influences of 'outsider-ness' and local suspicions. There is a sense in which people in their desire to be left alone and to avoid the intrusiveness and risk of inquiry, find the intrusion of outsiders threatening. The rejection felt by some foreigners is, I suspect, preceded by some misunderstanding of the context of Tamil lives in the north, combined

with high expectations of Tamil hospitality without recognising its explicable limitations. Many Tamil homes and lives have been brutally transgressed, invaded and divided; privacy is therefore valued and necessitated in these circumstances. Relationships require an understanding based on not making false assumptions or misrepresentation, as well as a mutual sense of trust. When talking about the future of the north in relation to potential tourists, I was told: “I don’t mind people coming here, as long as they leave again”. Added to this is the impact on the local economy of rising property prices, forced up by the aid agencies and foreign Tamils buying, selling or renting properties at inflated prices, which is forcing many locals out of the market.

Acceptance was influenced by firmly held convictions concerning fate (*vithi*). The ‘auspiciousness’ of certain meetings according to date, place and any apparent coincidences served to reassure people of legitimacy and were seen as part of the fulfilment of some aspect of *karma*. For example, my room faced an *Amman* temple and this was seen as an important connection between the goddess and myself. An interest in Hinduism was considered rare, as was any expression of a desire to visit the temple, or understand Tamil customs: eating local food, wearing a sari (even more than the *shalwar kameez*, an import rather than local dress), eating and enjoying the food - all were welcomed as a source of both pleasure and as a sign of respect.

Despite the arrival of the outside world, it was often stated that although there was no war, neither was there peace in Jaffna: “*santhaiyum illai, samaathanamum illai*”. This is qualified by reference to the High Security Zones, the heavily armed presence of the military throughout the north and east, and the military checkpoints that have to be negotiated at the entry and exit points to the peninsula. Fears that the cease-fire would not hold were ever present, and the consequence of further fighting would be worse than anything seen or experienced in the past with little hope of escape. The ‘final’ war was mentioned when threats to Tamil autonomy arose and there were frequent references to the finality of this cease-fire and of people’s endurance stretched to its limit. Young people in particular, come under constant scrutiny and continue to feel the pressures of both the past and the present.

Tamil youth: provoked and provoking bodies

In the north and east all those under the age of thirty have lived through the country's most brutal period in history. They have been denied the opportunity and experience of growing and developing in a stable environment, instead their experience has been one of crushing brutality and isolation. The majority of young people have had to cope with a legacy of nightmares, terror and personal loss, but some have also shown a strength and resilience that has enabled them to pursue their lives in the current cease-fire atmosphere. Many were seeking educational opportunities, taking advantage of their ability to move around their environment relatively unhindered and make plans for the future. However, there are those for whom this has not been possible and who have been overwhelmed by their experiences of the conflict and the inexorableness of their position; caught between warring factions and exploited in the furtherance of a cause necessitated by political marginalisation and exclusion.

By foregrounding the experiences and effects of war on the youth of Jaffna, and their subsequent responses to it, I hope to show the negative impact of struggles for power. Failure to pay heed to the needs of civilians, or uphold the very ideologies they claim to defend: ideologies of peace, freedom, equality, economic progress, employment and better health and public service structures, have ensured they remain only a distant hope for most civilians living in Sri Lanka, and even more so following the 2004 tsunami. Through respective claims and demonstrations of power and domination, many have been brutalised and segregated through repeated incitations to acts of violence, which are then ruthlessly crushed and defeated. In order for each political faction to survive, it seems as though proportionate hostility must be preserved between them in order to maintain power and control. Both are mutually dependent on the other for preventing the attainment of their respective stated goals: peace. If peace through compromise were to be achieved, it might signal the end of their power: without conflict or corruption, politicians, elites and militants alike would flounder in an atmosphere of peace where the freedom to choose may lose them the support of the besieged citizens of Sri Lanka. Unification of the nation state and self-rule are the respective battle cries that now incite continuous antipathy between the two ethnic groups as the only method of retaining

power^{liii}. Despite recent concessions from both sides, these have not been sufficient to rectify divisions and hostility, where actions undermine all statements of intent, progress is minimal and the people are forced to remain silent.

Overall, responses to the war have taken strikingly divergent paths among all sections of the population. Many expressed a wish to forget the past and concentrate on building a future; others acknowledged its impact and were willing to discuss it and some planned to leave the region entirely. There were also those among the youth population who seemed to be re-enacting their entrapment through continuing acts of rage. It must be pointed out that hostility and aggression had become a feature within the population generally following the cease-fire, not only among the youths. There were instances of institutional antagonism, inter-caste hostility, and violence perpetrated towards the self in the form of self-harm and suicide. But violence was most explicitly enacted among the male youth population where there were fewer random acts of aggression and more instances of controlled re-enactments of violence that seemed to suggest a form of representation. There was a connectedness and structure to it whereby gang members would together watch and then replay scenes from particular, stylised videos from South India. There was a sense that this was some attempt to transmit a message publically: one that was impossible to state in words, but that could convey through refraction and mirroring, the explicit violence that had been perpetrated against them.

Both government troops and the insurgents alike have targeted the younger generation. The currently disruptive youths seem to demonstrate the failures of the past twenty-five years: the demise of traditionally held views of Jaffna Tamil culture that include respect for the social hierarchy, a strong work ethic, morality and religious devotion. They are now the focus of disquiet among the community elders and many women, and there is often talk of a need to communicate with and understand them better. Often conversations revert to complaints about their aggressive behaviour, but I also wondered if there was an element of guilt over a collective inability to protect these young people from the terror and brutalisation of the war. Or were they scapegoats to ward off anarchy and chaos. Whilst these common expressions of fear were undoubtedly an important factor, they were also a reality not entirely to be explained by youthful rebellion or scapegoating alone; to some degree the disquiet was justified by the actions, although the

causes needed to be acknowledged and understood more fully. I would also suggest that there were other youths who sought to re-order their painful experiences within a more positive framework contained within the transformation of the performative ritual of *thuukkukkaavadi*.

The exponential increase in the performance of *thuukkukkaavadi* suggested it also had a role in understanding the consequences of years of conflict and violence, again from among the youth population who were its main protagonists. It was frequently remarked how the ritual's increase coincided with the sudden rise in the arrests and torture of Tamils after 1996, when the Sri Lankan army arrived to occupy the northern Jaffna peninsula. This appeared superficially to be a form of violence turned on the self, rather than outwards towards the community, but it also had to be acknowledged that locally, it was viewed positively and was seen to benefit not only the individual but also those around him. It had even transcended barriers of caste and class – and even religion, in one instance that I came to hear of. Open criticism of it was seldom voiced, as though it was inherently understood that the extreme experiences of these youths were such that it had become in a sense sanctioned.

In terms of the overall setting in which these events were taking place, there were few legal structures *in situ* to ensure safety. The Sinhalese army and police were largely passive in openly maintaining law and order, and their difficulties were compounded by their inability to communicate in Tamil. Due to the enmity of some local Tamils if they sought to enforce laws and punish offenders, crowds would gather quickly and become violent. Protests were often fuelled, to further demonstrate their incompetence. Alternatively, a phone call placed to the local Tamil Tigers positioned throughout the peninsula, would bring a couple of cadres on their motor bikes to dispense a warning that if not heeded would lead to punishment - sometimes severe. Women, feeling especially vulnerable in the climate of near lawlessness, spoke of the kind of security provided by the Tamil Tigers up to the mid-1990s with great nostalgia. This was despite their acknowledgment of the LTTEs sometimes excessive use of violence as punishment. Meanwhile, the young women were trapped in their homes, fearful of walking out on the streets after dark and the young men were ruling the community through fear and intimidation.

The disintegration of community and village life has reduced the power and influence of social structures to maintain order; exacerbated by the greater opportunities that have arisen through financial affluence provided by relatives from abroad enabling many to buy motorbikes, and move around the peninsula more freely. Incidences of violence took place in both rural and urban areas; anonymity was provided for the gangs through their increased mobility. Inter-village rivalries were said to be fuelled by both army and the various other political/paramilitary groups, in order to split communities and thereby claim factional loyalty. There appeared to be no specific or directed targets for the anger. However, there were occasions on which it was possible to identify an objective; for example the big Kanthaswamy temple festival was known as an opportunity for incongruous, inappropriate behaviour where anonymity afforded the opportunity to disrupt and aggravate. Property was also a target: the house next door to where I lived was being rebuilt and one night when it was near completion a large, but unnervingly quiet group of youths came and smashed all its glass windows and broke some of the roof tiles. They operated in silence; there were no voices, no shouting, rage or even laughter and there was no obvious reason why this house or its inhabitants should have been targeted, other than envy of their good fortune. The perpetrators were a well-known gang in the area, their leader living nearby and known by reputation to the family.

Women often seemed to be an easier target and there were many reports of incidences perpetrated against women: verbal harassment, physical and sexual assaults. One interviewee stated that it was because many women no longer had the protection and associated respect of a husband or male relatives, which left them vulnerable to insult and attack. Rumours abounded of women's vulnerability without husbands or relatives for protection - especially in the presence of the Sri Lankan army who were rumoured to have attacked several women; this seemed to lead to many of them to support the Tamil Tigers who were known for ensuring personal safety.

Those not fortunate enough to escape abroad; who did not have the support of relatives or adequate financial resources to arrange their escape remained behind and bore the brunt of the fighting in a constant state of threat and terror. Many were arrested under suspicion of LTTE affiliation by the security forces, as well as being targets for recruiters to the various Tamil militant groups. Growing up in this hostile climate of fear and expectation

of violence as well as the reality of violence, has for some given them a feeling of boldness and an apparent lack of concern regarding danger and personal safety. I spoke to some youths in their early-twenties who acknowledged their fearlessness concerning violence, stating that they were more accustomed to it than a state of peace; whilst this is undoubtedly in part an act of bravado, there is also truth in their learned ability to almost scorn such high levels of brutality. They now find themselves having to live in its aftermath, which in its current unstable form threatens to break out again, and leaves them unable to let down their guard. At the same time they are adjusting to the pressures of exposure to the outside world with the opening of the A9 road leading south, towards the rest of the country and world. Their Tamil relatives visiting from abroad, the onslaught of the mass media and greater access to money and material possessions has been likened to 'a cork exploding from a bottle'.

The south Indian films used as inspiration by the gangs, have lead to graphic acts of violence and several hospitalisations. The film heroes are usually portrayed as battle-weary, troubled, revenge-seeking men, who react with brutal intensity in the pursuit of an idealised, enlightened self, but their path to retribution is strewn with prolonged and bloody battles. These films appear to be used as some kind of pressure valve for stored up aggression and rage towards the world; the final act of retribution however, appears to be absent, ensnaring them in repetitious cycles of violence. In watching these films one can say that they are no worse than many Hollywood blockbusters, but their effect on a population brutalised by real acts of violence seems to have made their effect more potent.

These gangs operate in contravention to the prevailing LTTE rhetoric that enforces lawfulness and a strict moral code. This is despite the LTTE's own videos that are shown as part of a recruitment drive, depicting real battles and the ensuing lingering deaths of cadres as they become martyrs for the cause. Some also claim the gangs are permitted for the purpose of demonstrating the weakness of the army and police against the strength of the LTTE; the only ones capable of controlling them. The gangs (and some disillusioned army soldiers) are also said to help in illegal trafficking and smuggling activities between the LTTE and some corrupt businessmen operating in the north. Weapons such as

machetes and various other kinds of knives are widely available and sold openly in street markets; also chains, grenades and guns are available and accessible.

In Central America (Guatemala, El-Salvador and Nicaragua) incidences of youth gang violence among communities affected by long-standing conflicts, are rife. The anthropologist Green (2004) [1998] and journalist Lydersen (2004) describe how the increase in cases of extreme aggression and acts of violence within the youth population is directed mostly towards young women. Many of these males had been at the forefront of the conflict both as victims and perpetrators of violence. Their familiarity with, and brutalisation by such extremes imploded on a society already devastated by war. The means with which to perpetrate violence was found through a market flooded with weapons and in combination with the loss of family and community support, is having a devastating effect on recovery processes. Increases in the use of alcohol suggest a way of obliterating the memories of actions perpetrated during conflict (Green 2004) [1998]. Greater and stricter policing methods have proven unsuccessful and draconian immigration procedures and extraditions from the US towards these countries, has exacerbated the situation. Rodgers (2002) found that over time new influences affected the levels and types of gang violence in Nicaragua, where once gang loyalties maintained some social cohesion within the designated barrios, latterly these have been eroded by the increase in drug taking, particularly crack-cocaine. Self-interest has replaced the sociality of the street gangs. These wars ended over a decade ago, but the effects are long-term and have implications for Sri Lanka, as well as other post-conflict countries.

The conflict is often said to be ethnically based, but this is too simplistic and essentialist in its construction of both identity (a questionable term in itself), and the role of politics. The younger generations of Jaffna Tamils have different experiences and concerns regarding their place in both Tamil and Sri Lankan society. An example is the seemingly paradoxical nature of their relationship with the Sinhalese army soldiers. Whilst one might expect some antagonism between them, and that is certainly the case, it is not the only facet of their relationship. Identification as 'the enemy' is by no means the only perspective one has of the other. I would suggest that to some extent, they share similar positions in terms of their experiences; that is to say both are targets of state and insurgent coercion. They have been ruthlessly exploited into perpetuating, as well as

perpetrating acts of extreme brutality, and used to bolster the positions of those who demand authority and control. At some level their shared and abused positions within the political and social hierarchy, has been recognised. Apart from more obvious anger, there is also much teasing between them that is not entirely hostile; they collude with each other in disrupting the accepted status quo by sharing alcohol, pornography, teaching each other rude words and insulting local young women. When the threat of war increases however, or divisive propaganda succeeds, these alliances rapidly fall away and both parties resume their former divided and hostile positions as enemies. Both are used in a war that is supposedly to unify a nation or secure a homeland, both ideals that are divisive and seemingly irreconcilable.

Acknowledgement of the role the war has had in releasing this hostility among the youths, has created great ambivalence among the older generation. Many of them supported the war as the only option available against southern chauvanism, but they are now being made to witness its corrupting effects. Instead of examining its negative impact and attempting to break the cycle of violence, both the military and the insurgents alike allow an atmosphere of lawlessness, which exploits the frustrations of these youths. The one to undermine Tamil society and weaken its resolve for autonomy; the other to implicate and confirm the immorality and ineptitude of the government and its army. The perceived negative influence of outsiders also keeps the Tamils isolated.

Thuukkukkaavadi superficially appears another example of violence, albeit one directed towards the self through its inscription of pain on the body. Although it has arisen out of acts of great brutality – many of the devotees were imprisoned and tortured; it seeks to redress the experience of victim-hood by retaking control of not only pain, but also more importantly, agency. It is a reflection or a mirroring of what occurred in their prison cell, but is transformed through reclamation of agency. This is carried out through the auspices of the deity who has already protected the devotee and ensured their release from imprisonment and suffering. They will continue to protect if sufficient penance and homage is paid, especially through a vow to undertake *thuukkukkaavadi*.

There is also an element of youthful challenge among devotees and many joke about the forthcoming experience, which naturally leads one to question its seriousness as an act of devotion. I discovered however, that while some do not always have clearly stated

religious aims or intent, they are earnest in their desire to challenge themselves by confronting pain and thereby take back control of not only their bodies, but also their lives that were so brutally and callously obliterated through their violation in prison and as civilians in war. There is no joking during the event itself; it is always undertaken within thoughtful and committed displays of emotion and devotion that confirm its import as a ritual connected to release from suffering, that takes place for all participants including family and village members.

Power, provocation and resistance

Definitions of 'power' are often associated with notions of 'violence'. The two are inextricably linked in explanations of the nature and effect of power on society and on the body. In Sri Lanka, power is now being contested over the bodies of the Tamils, in the struggle for each group to maintain its fragile and brittle status: a status that is constructed around either the reality of war or conditions of conflict and contestation regarding 'otherness' or 'dissonance'. An exigency of dispute is required that enables both parties, the government and the LTTE as the most dominant of the insurgent groups, to maintain their political and economic dominion over their respectively disputed regions and peoples. To do this there has to be a clearly identified region and/or body over which to contest – this has become especially crucial following instabilities in the southern political parties and now the tenuous position of the LTTE whose identification of a cohesive Tamil nation is thrown into confusion by the defection of the eastern LTTE leader, Karuna. By keeping the civilian population segregated through a state of fear (in the northeast) and material impoverishment (in the south) their silent acquiescence is assured. Each side is co-dependent on the other to prop up their weak political positions. Their antagonism and opposition, bolstered by acts of violence from both sides ensures that an endless struggle for power is maintained within and between both groups that prevents the collapse of either. This locks them in an endless battle of blame and counter blame, with ordinary Sri Lankans caught in its trap.

Polarities of power and powerlessness are to some extent an artifice according to Scott (1990), whereby the appearance of submissiveness towards figures of authority belies an

“off-stage” stance of mockery and subtle resistance. In effect, the powerless create an alternative discourse of dissent through a subversion of language and action, often hidden from public view, but prevalent in the form of jokes, gossip, petty acts of sedition and street theatre. As a form of resistance to domination, dissonant discourse undoubtedly occurs in the north but only in the most intimate and private of spheres; there is no open ridicule, mockery or display of humour aimed at the oppressor. These dramas are played out in both public and private spheres as Scott describes them; these “hidden” and “public transcripts” enable a critique of power relations and imbalances that can be articulated safely by those who are largely defenceless within political and social elites (1990). The form in which this critique of power relations occurs is heavily disguised through acts of insubordination that both contradict and contrast with the appearance of submission. Scott suggests that “the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask” (p.3); in Jaffna, masks are “thick” and worn for defence and self-protection; to remove them would involve an act of immense risk. Instead, rumour, gossip and more subversive, covert actions serve to give messages of resistance. Both the gangs and *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees create such acts of insubordination through their performances.

In order to maintain their hegemonic status, the elite must allow a certain degree of “world-upside-down” playfulness to take place (Babcock 1978; Littlewood 1998; Needham 1979; Scott 1990) through the inversion of classical symbols of privilege, thereby maintaining a position of dominance in the long term. The condonement of a certain playful rebelliousness and provision of space to vent frustrations, both placates and releases tension in order to deflect real rebellion. Power relations in Sri Lanka are multi-conflictual however and therefore pose more risk than in settings with greater clarity between the dominant and the oppressed: there are many ‘sides’ and configurations of what comprises loyalty and disloyalty.

In a country such as Sri Lanka that has for centuries lived under oppressive colonial rule and latterly suffered under an ineffective and marginalising political system that has led to the rise of nationalistic and militant reactionism, symbolic inversions are to be anticipated. They show a certain sophistication I would suggest. Examples include the LTTE’s punishment of individual’s accused of caste discrimination; the trance states (*paravasam*) that provide one means by which the disaffected can redress social or

gender imbalances. Many temple devotees in trance are female and as noted later in this study, what would normally be considered socially inappropriate and insulting behaviour can be permitted and even tolerated. A certain degree of playful misbehaviour is also permitted at the *theetham* (water-cutting) ceremony heralding the end of the twenty-five day Kanthaswamy temple festival in Jaffna. Thousands of youths are permitted by the temple management to leap into the sacred waters of the temple tank, hurling water at each other and anyone in the near vicinity, in an act of abandonment not normally tolerated in the hallowed grounds of the temple^{liv}. *Thuukkukkaavadi* presents perhaps a more extreme version of symbolic inversion: these young Tamils have inverted their experiences of war, imprisonment and torture through reproductions of bodily pain as acts of religious devotion. Their critique of the violence perpetrated against them, is cloaked in a disguise of religious passion that also enables them to reclaim a sense of power (*shakthi*) through their own agency. What was taken away in torture - namely all notion of control and sense of self - is reinstated through a managed and ritualised act under the protection of the chosen deity. Through their bodies they regain some sense of self-determination through the control of time, space and the exercise of free-will leading to liberation and release. This is permissible through its adherence to an accepted model of ritualised devotion.

The extensive infiltration and observation of the populace makes anonymity rare, even within crowds - real or imagined the fear of surveillance has the power to silence and invoke conformity. Therefore these examples of symbolic inversion are perhaps more discrete through their accordance with existing ritual practices, rather than perhaps more overt carnivalesque acts: ritual has provided a method that enables the expression of complex experiences. However, less playful and more overt acts of insubordination in the form of gang violence are also permitted, but for quite different reasons.

Acts of insubordination are sometimes permitted by the army and militants alike, for two reasons: not only to stifle real rebellion, but also to suggest to the rest of the population - misleadingly - how preternaturally violent and in need of armed containment the Tamils are, and to demonstrate the ineptitude of the army in containing the aggression of the Tamil youths. The former is perhaps similar to “directed mimesis” as described by Feldman (2004:213) [1994], whereby the aggressor shines the mirror of his own violence

onto that of the victim, providing justification for his acts of violence. This idea, already familiar from psychoanalysis through the concept of 'projection', has also been used in studies of colonialism (Sartre 1963; Taussig, 1987) and representations of racism within the media (Feldman 2004). I would suggest that in addition, it could be applied in the context of productions of an imputed, but false notion of Tamil aggressiveness. Both sides disseminate the idea of this purported Tamil aggressiveness as part of their prevailing political and militant discourses in support of ongoing acts of atrocity. (The media also has a large role in disseminating these stereotypical images). Perceptions concerning the authors and recipients of violence are crucial in understanding conflict. Those fighting for political and military domination utilise their capacity to propagate and disseminate ethnically stereotyped images in the furtherance of violence and in the process, make it justifiable. The southern political and military elite discourse ascribes agency to the Tamil people for acts of aggression and for which they (government and military) are forced to respond in defence of the unity of the nation. Simultaneously, Tamils are also portrayed as in need of protection and rescue by government forces from their own Tamil oppressors, in the belief that if free to do so, they would opt to return to the fold of a mythically inclusive Sri Lankan nationhood.

Likewise, the LTTE discourse conveys an image of the '*Thamil akkal*' (Tamil people) as possessing a barely contained anger and violence^{lv}. Resulting from years of prolonged injustice, they are consequently compelled to respond on their behalf as their true 'representatives'^{lvi}. Whilst it is true to say that there is great anger among the Tamils at the injustices of the last two decades, it is also true to say that many are sickened by the levels of violence perpetrated in their names.^{lvii} The fact that most Tamils feel caught in the web of propaganda issuing from both sides is seldom acknowledged: as was frequently rhetorically stated to me with regard to protection of Tamil rights "*who else is there?*". Girard (1972) suggests that such cycles of violence "cannot burn itself out" (p. 86); its end depends on the termination of all violence that is "self-propagating". Both the state and the militants' own hegemonic violence is mimetically transferred to the object (the Tamil people) and serves to legitimise their aggressive acts^{lviii}. Any insubordination therefore, has little to do with the healthy release of hostile tensions as a safety valve, or a method to avoid open rebellion. It is in fact a symmetrical provocation

that seeks to demonstrate ineptitude and powerlessness, posited against their claims to power, dominance and authority.

As noted earlier, Feldman (1991) describes how the political prisoner in northern Ireland “makes his body the principle of his dissociation from the rituals of domination” (p. 138); the experienced prisoner finds a way of both disconnecting his body from the space of torture and at the same time subverts the interrogator’s dominance over him by exchanging his body for silence. The body becomes the shared tool within the interrogation that can be controlled by the prisoner, rather than the interrogator by the subversion of time and agency through a body double, so to speak. The captive instigates the violence as a method of control through his own agency, transforming and manipulating time by truncating it to suit himself rather than his antagonist. He refers to a “political rite of passage” whereby the body enters the interrogation space in one form and emerges afterwards transformed. As an act of resistance, this develops the view of both Scarry (1985) and Foucault (Rabinow 1984) who describe state domination of the body in the form of respectively, torture and institutional captivity, by identifying how the body is able to resist and counter violence through the inversion of ritual. As stated previously, the body ritual of *thuukkukkaavadi* provides a form of resistance to counteract the violent practices of domination and control found in institutions of torture and oppression. Mimesis, in the setting of interrogation, escalates and reproduces the violence that is already inevitable and enables the body of the interrogated to subvert through distortions of time and agency the state doctrine. In all matters of imprisonment, interrogation or torture it is the state ideology that is being perpetuated and sustained as a method of control and as a demonstration of power. By provoking the interrogator into pre-emptive acts of violence, the interrogated both resists and sabotages reproduction of the state hegemony, thereby reducing their power to dominate and control. According to Daniels (1996), the inexpressibility of language during torture leads to expression through metaphor: “pain’s entry into cultural semeiosis....a re-expression through objectification in iconic metaphors”. The experience of pain that resists all attempts at translation into oral form, I suggest is instead translated symbolically through the body within the sphere of this religious ritual, which eloquently transcribes the torture

experience, whilst at the same time apprehending control and power from the torturer and re-positioning it within the authority of the victim.

But what of the gangs? Taking Feldman's model, they provoke and challenge through pre-emptive acts of aggression, mirroring the violence that was done to them in the past. These ritualistic re-enactments taken from classic cinematic images of 'heroism' provoke fear in others, but are in fact a mimetic reproduction of the violence perpetrated against them during the war. The universal message of most of these films presents the protagonist undertaking to crush his enemies and in the process, discover his true self – however in this instance these youths seem unable to reach this stage, instead trapped in a cycle of violence without end. Until the *incitement* to violence ceases, I would surmise that these re-enactments ('re-enacted' because violence does not originate with these young Tamils) will continue. These youths through provocation are reproducing the hegemonic violence of both state and insurgents alike, and which is made possible both through their own brutalising experiences in the past, and the ongoing state of 'no war, no peace'. Through their hostility they are attempting to communicate the ongoing violence of, and to those around them: their distress and anger is graphic and explicit.

The humiliations of war

In safer times, many people would sleep out on the open veranda where it is coolest; this stopped with the onset of the conflict, which created an atmosphere of fear that still remains. Doors and external windows are barred every evening and families remain locked inside. As stated, cordon-and-search operations by Sri Lankan Army (SLA) soldiers or Special Task Force (STF) operatives were a common experience during the war; often sons, fathers and other male relatives would be taken away and never seen again. Women, feeling terrorised and threatened in their own homes would often be separated into rooms alone where they were assaulted or raped; theft was rife and many had valuables including the wedding *Thaali* stolen or their possessions destroyed in acts of rage and resentment at the perceived wealth of the Tamils. The home of an acquaintance living on one of the islands, was occupied by the army while she and her

family were still in residence; when the soldiers left, the family were made to watch as all their possessions and their home was systematically taken apart. They wrecked the furniture, broke the TV and radio, stole the ceiling fans, roof tiles, door and window frames for wood to build bunkers. There are now rumours that many thefts take place with soldiers and local thieves acting in collusion, and made possible due to the passivity of the local police.

There was little safety either outside or indoors during the war; several personal stories relate how children were shot from strafing helicopters as they played in their gardens or were caught in landmine explosions. Very few Tamils under the age of thirty are able to swim, mostly because the beaches were heavily mined and the risk of missiles being fired from out at sea was ever present; anyone playing on the beach became a sitting target. A neighbour was standing in her kitchen cooking the midday meal when a skirmish broke out around the house between some army soldiers and LTTE; she was hit by pieces of shrapnel and suffered severe stomach injuries. Another woman caught in the crossfire of a battle between two warring Tamil insurgent groups, was hit by a bullet and had to have her spleen removed. These personal testimonies are interspersed with larger scale instances of terror wrought on the civilian population as a whole and from all sides, which form a barely articulated backdrop to the fear that continues to grip the north. Cycles of violence that have been witnessed on countless occasions and that many believe will break out again, offer no sense of safe passage out this time.

LTTE rhetoric claims that if forced, they will engage in a 'final' battle for Eelam, suggesting something worse than has been experienced so far; whether rhetoric or a reality, it has the power to capture the imagination of a population only too aware of what that final battle might be like. Instances of assassination and sporadic violence have marred the cease-fire agreement almost continuously since it came into force, but more so as the months and years have progressed with little discernable improvement in the lives of inhabitants of the northeast.

Humiliation plays a significant role in the control and oppression of people both collectively and individually: it serves the oppressor as a tool to undermine self-confidence and respect, dignity and trust, and as such has great power in the realm of war. According to Scott, the exertion of control often comes through tactics of

humiliation: this was undoubtedly the case in Jaffna, with the continuous degradation experienced by Tamils in every aspect of their lives on a daily basis. Following occupation of the northern peninsula, military check points were established at nearly every road junction and had to be negotiated every time the inhabitants wished to traverse their neighbourhood; on the way to work, to school/university, to the shops or to visit friends and relatives. Each time Identity Cards (IC) had to be produced: sometimes as many as five different forms of identification existed, also included were frequent body searches. Women crossing the checkpoints would be searched: including hair, underclothes – even sanitary napkins, in the search for ammunition or other weapons, ensuring that no smuggled items were being passed on to the militants. Food purchases including rice, flour, vegetables and fish, would be ransacked in the search for contraband and sometimes money would be coerced, as well as other valued possessions.

Threats, molestation and insults were endured on a regular basis, according to females I spoke with. Moving around the confines of their labyrinthine neighbourhoods became a nightmare of humiliation and fear, making some reluctant to go outside. Other humiliations affected relationships between parents and their children: in seeking to protect their offspring, elders would feign deference towards the occupying soldiers in order to avoid confrontation and possible further violence. The youngsters did not always understand this and perceived it as a humiliating obsequiousness and cowardice, which lead to their contempt and the alienation of families (Somasundaram 1998). Many Tamils were bribed into providing particular items for the soldiers: hospital workers were told to bring bandages and other medical aids to the checkpoints, and did so in fear of retribution of the next time they had to pass through. Sick relatives were refused permission to visit the hospital after curfew and many died as a result. Fishermen at night still have to seek permission to return earlier than their allotted time span if sick, or if the weather is bad and are often kept out at sea in their small fishing craft for hours, exposed to the elements until papers have been signed and permission granted.

Tactics of humiliation were not the prerogative of the SLA however; there was also the degradation of Tamil civilians perpetrated by the various Tamil paramilitary groups. The LTTE's banishment of the northern Muslims in 1990 with only a few hours notice to quit, was a form of humiliation that has yet to be fully resolved. Some Tamils complain that

they were used as human shields by the LTTE who would infiltrate deep into the villages to hide. This would draw the army into the village and Tamil homes, exposing the inhabitants not only to cross-fire, but also to interrogation and imprisonment after the militants had disappeared back into the jungle. All the villagers would be rounded up, most of the men would be removed, leaving the women terrified and open to abuse. There were many assassinations of those supporting or belonging to opposition groups or of those suspected of being 'collaborators' a loose term in this context, which meant anyone with doubtful allegiances. At the time of the mass exodus, Tamils in the north were made ever more fearful of the encroaching SLA, by LTTE announcements that were circulated stating that the army would rape and murder anyone remaining behind. This forced the majority into a terrible, and for some deadly exile into the jungles of the Vanni where resources were lacking, malaria, and dengue were rife, food was contaminated and shelter was inadequate. Stories abound of the sight of the heaving masses, struggling with possessions, walking out of the peninsula with no idea of where they were going and what lay ahead.

Tamil civilians also suffered at the hands of the other paramilitary groups. Those most active over the last twenty or more years have been the EPRLF, EPDP, PLOTE and TELO (see Appendix I). These groups at various times were not always seen as sympathetic to the plight of ordinary Tamils. They were said to have exposed Tamil civilians to risk and danger as a means of achieving their own set of political and militant goals. They have attempted to coerce, threaten, bribe and subjugate civilians to varying degrees, including the assassination of local civic leaders who were seen to challenge or oppose their ideals and methods. It has appeared at times that there was no one with a genuine interest or desire to protect and defend the Tamil people.

Today, criminality and caste discrimination are dealt with frequently through humiliation: even serious crimes, which are treated harshly have an element of disgrace, for example the note pinned to the lifeless chest of a criminal detailing his crimes^{lix}. Public humiliation is also used for lesser crimes, whereby notification of misdemeanours are posted around their village or town community; used also as a reminder or warning to others of the consequences and ensuing punishment meted out to offenders. Rumours abound as to the whereabouts of miscreants who disappear from home and job, and claims are made that

during this period he or she will be 're-educated' in one of the LTTE camps before returning, chastened to their families, the incident never to be referred to or spoken of again.

Humiliations still exist in every day life for Tamils in the north, as I came to realise each time I journeyed south by bus, passing through the personal and bag searches at the four checkpoints en route. Each time, I encountered the same complaints from fellow passengers: the restrictions and lack of freedom placed on them simply to move around their own country, was experienced as an infamy that none felt they should have to endure.

The degradation of having to live in a refugee camp, knowing your own home is only a few kilometres away, or staying in the abandoned homes of fellow exiled Tamils who might return to reclaim their property at any time, was also a constant source of instability and humiliation. Tamil homes confiscated by both sides to be used either as army camps or militant bases are often neglected and badly damaged; not only structurally but also the possessions and artefacts that had to be left behind in the scramble to leave, have been despoiled and tarnished. The *vidu* (home), so essential to the Tamil conception of identity and self-hood, has for many been desecrated and can never be reinhabited comfortably. Some Tamils from abroad can no longer visit relatives in the north due to the extortionate amounts of money being demanded by the LTTE in the form of taxes. On enquiring about the new charges at the checkpoint shortly after it had been introduced, I was simply told by a cadre that it was: "*Thamil Ilam, sariyaa?*" ("Tamil Eelam, OK?").

The threat of humiliation is a powerful and coercive tool to wield over a population – as powerful as the act of humiliation itself and enables the suppression of dissent. Rumours have played a significant part in maintaining fear within the civilian population who are powerless to respond for fear of further humiliation, arrest or even death, these feelings have had to be subsumed and displaced. Sri Lanka has the highest suicide rate in the world – including among Tamil populations living in exile (Canadian Tamils have the highest suicide rate in the country); suicide is an act of extreme aggression and desperation directed towards the self in the context of ongoing humiliation, suppressed

rage and the inability to take control of one's own destiny, both collectively and individually.

Internalised violence and 'cultures of fear'

Violence continues during the cease-fire and has become turned inwards. The destruction of Tamil society appears in some aspects facilitated through an incitement to fear, alienation and violence towards the self - unwillingly and unwittingly, through a 'culture of terror' (Taussig 1984:3). This violence, which may also be symbolic in nature, is familiar from the pre-independence era. The shame and humiliation become internalised and as Scheff (1977) describes can become transformed into rage.

Sri Lanka's high suicide rate had dropped prior to the cease-fire (Somasundaram 1998). At the time of the conflict, the possibility of death through bombing or enlisting in one of the militant organisations was higher, but now in the present stalemate incidences of attempted and actual suicide have increased again (Somasundaram, personal communication, 2004). It is notable that it is highest among the youth population (Ganesvaran et al. 1984). The motivation for suicide is of course, varied and complex; it depends on gender, age, economics, social status and past events as well as present problems. Some of the wide-ranging circumstances that lead individuals to contemplate and attempt suicide in Jaffna have included: pressures and responsibilities of maintaining and keeping the family together following the death of a parent; sexual abuse; unwanted pregnancy; alcoholism; financial problems; troubled family relationships and overcrowded living conditions (Somasundaram and Sivayokan, 2000). Underlying these varied reasons, the war and its barbarity have been causal factors and contributed to the ongoing social distress. Everyday strains can become monumental pressures when posited against a background of prolonged exposure to violence and threat; many personal stories appeared on the surface to be about minor disputes and petty injustices, but on further investigation came from much deeper and more destructive alterations that were undermining the family and/or social structure. Seemingly petty arguments that lead to an overdose are often just the final straw in a long process of loss and deprivation.

Robben (2005) refers to a 'culture of fear' (p.272) that arose in Argentina during the 1970s. It emanated from extreme brutality and intimidation by the police and military, as more and more people disappeared into torture cells - often situated within seemingly ordinary homes commandeered by the state forces. People were afraid to talk about missing children and family members as they were often disbelieved in an atmosphere of state repression, denial and secretiveness. A form of passive violence forced relatives to deny to neighbours, friends and even to other relatives, the disappearance of a family member. Keeping their terror to themselves, many were threatened by the security forces that if they spoke out, they would return and take away the other children. This also meant that effectively, there was a second 'disappearance' when other relatives, fearful for the lives of their own children, had to sever all contact with the family of the disappeared as though they posed a risk of contamination, merely by association.

This concealment and ostracisation that segregated families from one another, was imposed by external and subtle means that essentially aimed to destroy the structure and authority of the family system. State power was maintained through this 'culture of fear' that forced not only neighbours and communities to cease all contact with one another, but even within the family itself. Through fear, the family became silent and learnt to conceal the violence; thus removing the necessity of the state to perpetrate greater destruction – the silent removal of one member was sufficient to silence and intimidate whole sections of the population. State control, which aimed to keep people from talking and acting in unified dissent, succeeded by imposing fear and silence through a form of internalised violence. Suspicion between neighbours was cultivated as a form of divisiveness in relation to contested political loyalties, and threats of the unknown were a powerful incentive in keeping Argentinians quiet and alienated from one another. Again, seemingly innocent tools or items were subverted and used to instil terror in the population: bombs were concealed in cinemas, train stations and within gifts (Robben, 2005).

In Jaffna, inhabitants are encouraged not only to be suspicious of one another, but also fearful. Likewise, they have internalised state violence that desires their segregation – state forces do not have to *enforce* the population's segregation: they do it very effectively by implanting a 'culture of fear' - or to use Taussig's term 'culture of terror'

(1987). Random executions and murders occur on the peninsula that are inexplicable and appear to have no causal factors in terms of misdemeanors: often it is innocent young males who are found beheaded or shot. There is no logic or sense to these seemingly random acts of violence and no one is sure who the perpetrators are, but the message serves to warn people and succeeds in keeping everyone apart, in fear – and especially those who might cause greatest alarm: the youths.

Whilst acknowledging the awfulness of the war, many stated that the present lawlessness, uncertainty and amorality was more threatening – especially for women. Real or perceived, the state of unofficial curfew that keeps women indoors also seems to beg the question; what possible risk might women pose by being allowed to move freely outdoors after darkness? Fears of women's vulnerability to what Douglas terms a "dangerous sexuality" (Douglas 1966:149) are linked to fears of a breakdown in not only morality, but also social order. The inference being that women are in need of constraint and containment (inside), because their association with the wild (outside) situates them as a source of pollution and threat to (male) order. Both Gluckman (1963) and Douglas (1966) have analysed the structures of social systems and what constituents make them effective and what does not. It is recognised that weak systems under threat from within have tighter and more constraining effects particularly for women, with the tight control of entrances and exits. The absence of effective policing in Jaffna seems to have given rise to fears regarding the social behaviour of young women and men generally.

It is not only women in fact who remain indoors; many men do also. The streets of Jaffna are effectively deserted after dark apart from a few, isolated gangs of youths. Everyone else has been terrified into staying in after dark and as a result have become more isolated and silent. I suspect it is this alienation and silence that holds the key to understanding why the cover of darkness is such a significant threat; and it relates to the necessity of keeping Tamils apart from one another. Darkness confers invisibility and therefore darkness provides a fertile breeding ground for dissent and possible subversionist activities. Frequent reference is made to the ubiquitous presence of the LTTE prior to 1996 on the streets of Jaffna and what is most remembered is the feeling of safety this instilled. They monitored everyone's behaviour, but now cannot do so openly, and instead must resort to circulating rumours of fear: hence Tamils remain separate and

alienated. Due to the difficulties in monitoring for twenty-four hours a day, night-time requires other methods of containment. Darkness introduces a notion of not only fear, but also intimacy that has been translated into a notion of immorality. Local rumours suggest that some (immoral) young men and women do in fact go out after dark, to engage in sexual behaviour otherwise not permitted within conservative Jaffna society. The inference being that the problem of immoral behaviour rather than subversive, dissenting talk is more easily related to and in a way feared, by a conservative society with strict rules regarding behaviour. Fears concerning immorality is therefore largely a fiction created to screen off real concerns about social and political dissidence and action. The government has neither the ability nor the desire to monitor activities of the Tamils constantly, and whilst the LTTE are often quoted as being moral arbiters for the Tamils, this is not as straight forward as it sounds. The reasons for this relate to both factions' fears of what intimacy might incur among the population: fears of immorality, AIDS and unwanted pregnancies are of course real, but I would suggest that greater are their fears of the freedom of political choice for the Tamils should they gather, talk and cohere with one another. This is a concern for both government and militants alike, who instead marshal easily aroused fears of contamination within this conservative, hierarchical society.

At the outset of the conflict between the Tamils and the government, threats from the outside were clear and solidarity within the Tamil regions was strong. However as the war progressed without any tangible benefits for Tamil civilians, the militants' system of control was weakened. Threats were perceived from within, that undermined their structure and stability leading to tighter and more restrictive surveillance and observation regarding dissension, misdeeds and non-conformity. As a consequence, men became 'contained' by the threat of either punishment or recruitment into the movement, and women were 'contained' by the threat of rape and molestation if they ventured out after dark. Despite the LTTE rhetoric that ascribes heroic status to women as fighters *within* the organisation, their strength is denied outside it where they are seen as weak and vulnerable. The female fighters containment therefore is ensured through their separation, control, and even death: but not emancipation.

Scott (1990) suggests “public acts of defiance” following humiliation and domination become intensely satisfying when released, as it puts an end to the constant mindfulness and at the same time repressed rage that naturally erupts from domination. Examples of release through acts of public defiance against the dominant political forces are limited across Sri Lanka; some are carefully orchestrated and cannot therefore be said to be genuine acts of defiance. In the past, Tamils held the notion that language could resolve conflict and violence; when problems began to surface in the 1930s peaceful protests were held. However, it was quickly learnt that peaceful protesting and open negotiation were ineffective in the face of unrelenting prejudice and acts of divisiveness used by many southern politicians; the result was the use of more overtly aggressive tactics which were found to have greater success in gaining attention. The younger Tamils, from the northern coastal areas of the peninsula in particular were more militant and employed strategies that included the first ever use of suicide bombers and the infamous cyanide capsule worn around the neck, taken to evade capture and talking under torture. These symbols of strength and violence replaced talking and negotiation, and appear to represent an internalisation of violence through self-destructiveness. When opposition and dissent arose from other Tamil political parties, it was swiftly crushed and eventually stamped out almost altogether: the silencing of the cyanide capsule and the silencing of political opposition became a familiar concept to Tamils, and a strategy of self-preservation.

There has to be a clear sense of loyalty and trust among the powerless themselves - whether they define themselves through social class or caste affiliation, in order to be able to articulate dissent (Scott, 1990). In the north this sense of loyalty, cohesion and trust has been so seriously undermined and eroded that it is almost impossible to know who thinks what and who can be confided in or trusted, making the insubordination required in true dissent, extremely difficult. This has created a kind of insularity among people, which although not new in Jaffna, has taken on a greater intensity. Discourses of support and dissent change depending on the circumstances locally and further a field in Colombo; if changes are perceived to be detrimental to the Tamils, criticism towards the army occupiers is more fearsome; whereas in more peaceful moments there is greater tolerance. Normally, attitudes to the army and police are ambivalent; rhetoric encourages

the population to view them as the antagonistic occupiers of Tamil land – which they undoubtedly are, but there is also recognition of their difficult role and the circumstances of their enrolment into the army as a way out of poverty in the rural villages of the south. Criticisms shift becoming more overt when the threat of war is more acute. There is a similar ambivalence towards the LTTE; depending on their actions, support waxes and wanes – if taxation increases and recruitment of child soldiers becomes more intense, so does quiet criticism. But if they mete out justice against criminals or are seen to defend local Tamils against bullying from the south, support for them rises.

In guarding against a possible backlash in the future should war break out again, people remain quiet and compliant; this has been a guiding principle in the north over many years whereby everyone has to bite back comments, protest or open dissention in order to ensure the protection of self and others. I witnessed on many occasions the changes wrought in the behaviour of the check point guards towards the Tamils, depending on the political situation. Joking and amiable when all was well, they became noticeably brusque during times when the cease-fire was under pressure.

With the loss of clarity, the violence experienced through years of conflict has turned inwards with many people finding themselves victims of gossip and rumour-mongering that has been very painful and destructive to lives and careers. Rumours exist in many societies, but when there is excessive pressure from outside the rumours become more cruel, pervasive and are rarely disbelieved; evidence is seldom required to authenticate these accusations. In the concentration camps of the Nazis in the Second World War, rumours rather than solidarity permeated life in the camps (Langer, 1991). Rumours can fulfil a necessary social function as a safety valve but in times of extremity can be destructive and constitute further acts of aggression. Divisiveness within society seems paradoxically to make people more compliant to those in command: there is less likelihood of opposition and protest if there is no sense of solidarity – resistance requires group cohesiveness. Individuals acting or speaking out alone are at greater risk if they put their heads above the parapet and openly criticise. Domination occurs as much through threat alone of what could happen, than through any need for actual punishment (S. Turner 1995). Warnings of the consequences of ‘misbehaviour’ infiltrate via rumour and the occasional act of punishment. Notions of “public” and “hidden transcripts” are a way

of understanding why open articulation of suffering and opposition are well nigh impossible in the north, other than between only a few trusted and close individuals. Resistance leads to assassination and survival depends on silence.

‘Thick masks’ and silence

In the north, exchanges concerning sensitive issues such as political allegiances have a tendency to become muted and hushed, and euphemisms are used to neutralise and disguise controversial subject matter. There is self-censorship, prohibitions on raising certain topics and a constant sense of watchfulness. If someone, as occasionally happens speaks out, either by making statements of their viewpoints or asking questions deemed out of bounds or taboo, this incurs discomfort at one level and ostracism at another^{lx}. Conversations contain only the briefest reference to critical or political argument or comment and are then rapidly subsumed and hidden among the mundanities of every day life; constant vigilance is required if clues are not to be missed. The pervasive atmosphere of fear and suspicion that dominates northern Sri Lanka, has given rise to a variety of responses that articulate the anger and helplessness that many feel, while at the same time avoiding the confrontation of direct and open dissent or spontaneous protest. Suarez-Orozco (1990) contends that recounting acts of atrocity is a form of ritual that promotes healing and at the same time publicly reviles the injustice. This is without doubt the case in settings where immediate threat has been removed either through the end of war or change in a political/military system, but as he himself also concludes, silence remains for those whose relatives have disappeared, or in the unresolved aftermath of war. In Sri Lanka to speak of collecting “testimonies” (Green 2004:190) [1998] as a method of healing seems premature in the prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty and threat. Silence or censorship concerning problematic subjects is the only recourse for those who are restricted in openly expressing their opinions about what is happening in their midst. Many have been silenced and have had to reconcile this enforced silence against the safety of family, friends and colleagues, often through bitter personal experience.

In southern Sri Lanka perpetrators and survivors of the JVP uprising live in close proximity as neighbours (Perera S. 1995, 2001) - a constant and continuing source of torment that remains largely neglected by the political and judicial system. The concept of 'neighbour' - a once comforting and supportive construct, has become an unstable notion following the conflict and many feel disconnected and alienated from others around them. Perera highlights the increase in reports from the local press of ghosts seen in many villages and towns in the south of people lost or killed in the struggle, suggesting that these stories may have become a way for people to understand their suffering, loss and guilt. These "post terror" (1995:46) discourses appear to help in the adjustment to the realities of intense violence, without the necessity of directly articulating these experiences. Argenti-Pillen (2003) has described how violence was contained through "cautious discourses" (p.122) and the performance of cleansing rituals to negotiate the complex relations between former adversaries. This maintains a perimeter of safety that allows neighbours to live alongside perpetrators of violence. These studies recognise the importance of acknowledging local understandings and containments of extreme violence, and confirm existing, effective means for managing traumatic experience.

In other documented studies (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Suarez-Orozco 1990), the victims of disappearances and torture only become 'particular' when violence is directed towards the middle-classes, whereas for everyone else violence is daily and routine (Scheper-Hughes 1992). This routinisation of violence towards the neglected under-classes ensures their silence. Some from the Sri Lankan academic community have criticised their fellow intellectuals and the middle classes living outside the north and east, for remaining silent concerning the atrocities perpetrated against those Tamils caught in the conflict in those areas (Perera, S. 1995; Hoole et al. 1991; Hoole 2003; Roberts 2005; Sivathamby 2005). Class distinctions that accept and accommodate suffering among certain members of the society (who are usually in the majority) help maintain the authority of the select few. Classifications of 'otherness' enable the acceptance and toleration of poverty, disease and violence by those at a distance from it, but who nevertheless have ownership of all the power and control. However, safety also has to be weighed against this desire to hear more from Tamil academic voices.

In Jaffna, the silence of neglect arises not from poverty, but from political and ethnic marginalisation. The prevailing political discourse identifies Tamils collectively, as the dissonant (ethnic) 'other': the public discourse attempts to present a picture of support and understanding towards the beleaguered Tamil population against the insurgents, but the behaviour of government agents including the police and army suggests otherwise with frequent searches, arrests and the imprisonment of many Tamils. Likewise, opinions that lie outside the dominant Tamil Tiger discourse are not tolerated, making dissent or protest futile. As stated, the balance of power relations must be carefully maintained by both factions in order to keep the minority silent and compliant.

Robben (2005) in his description of the silencing of relatives of the disappeared during the Argentine conflict of the 1970s, suggests that state terror encouraged and utilised fear enabling them to act with greater impunity in the face of this silence and an unwillingness to protest – until the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. With their babies napkins tied to their heads in poignant and symbolic reference to the disappearance and murder of their children, it was they who finally spoke out against the violence and ultimately demonstrated the power of cohesive, peaceful resistance. It would be easy to ask why protest such as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo has not been taken up successfully in Sri Lanka^{xi}. I would surmise that in Sri Lanka, silence became a necessary safeguard to the dilemmas and tensions posed by the divisive, interethnic and now intra-ethnic dimensions of warfare that claim on the one hand to unite the country as a whole, and on the other to protect and preserve the rights of the minority population from chauvinist and exclusionist policies of the southern polity. In the context of an unstable cease-fire and especially with the current renewal of hostilities and the consequent militarisation of society, there is a rise in the involvement of other paramilitary groups vying for the attention of the civilian population. Talk that is in disagreement with any of these ideologies can result in future social, political and economic ostracism and isolation at one end, and personal danger and turmoil at the other. Assassinations have become a part of the ongoing 'cease-fire' picture, with culpability switching between various groups and political factions, including different insurgent groups and government troops. Finding a safe position from which to articulate opinions and counter-arguments and ideas is virtually impossible for most Tamils, when positions of loyalty and support are

measured and monitored within an atmosphere of watchfulness and surveillance. Therefore, to keep silent is an act of self-preservation, clearly observable whenever questions are raised into sensitive subjects concerning loyalty, criticism and trust, which also include notions of alliance and ambivalence towards a necessitated tolerance for acts of violence, which one often encounters among the people of the north: against this complex and muddled backdrop, safety lies in silence.

The inexpressibility of extreme trauma such as from the Holocaust (Langer, 1991) is well known, but it has also been argued that silence can accord a position of empowerment – especially for women. Through ‘conscious agency’ Das (1991) cites Indian women brutalised through the violence of Partition, who through maintaining silence were rendered into a position of greater empowerment within a community that shamed and ostracised sexually violated women. Their use of metaphors and ways to describe events *around* the sexual attacks protected them from the dangers of openly and directly articulating the horrors of what had befallen them. Ross (2001) seems to share this view and recounts the way in which the wives of activists of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, articulate their experiences within the silence itself: “...*what is taken for silence in...speech is itself meaningful, a language...not that we excise and excavate words in order to reveal women’s experiences but that we reformulate a context, in which the silences give meaning*” (p.271). Similarly events circumventing the trauma itself were revealing and more easily articulated in Jaffna, and avoidance of direct responses to difficult questions was very evocative. I learnt quickly that certain clarifications and explanations would not be forthcoming when I erroneously sought understanding through certain questions. I later witnessed a very persistent foreign journalist attempt to extract information, which although seemingly harmless to her, was fraught with necessary censorship and could not to be answered. I could see the discomfort these questions were creating, but this was not picked up by the journalist, who left frustrated and with the impression that “*things aren’t so bad in Jaffna – not like in Bosnia*”.

Undoubtedly there is also ambivalence in silence; for example a sense of uncertainty regarding support for an organisation that defends the rights of Tamils, but often does so through extreme violence. For those who are pacifist in nature and/or religious

conviction, as well as those who lack political representation or certainty, this poses a controversial and confusing dilemma: better to remain silent therefore.

Ambiguity and rumour

A year into the cease-fire and there were burgeoning fears of AIDS and a concerted effort by the LTTE to warn and educate people as to the risks; this also had the feel of general risks posed by outsiders: “AIDS is knocking on our doors. Let[s] save ourselves and our society from AIDS” and “We take the campaign against AIDS in Jaffna as seriously as the war we fought to protect our peoples’ rights” (statements from LTTE Media Co-ordinator, 2003). The fears of a spread of AIDS in the north, proved a contentious subject: the LTTE had reportedly claimed that both the purported spread and increase in cases of HIV/AIDS was not a problem that arose internally, but rather was one that had arrived from outside. This was then ‘counter-propagandered’ by one of the leading Tamil opposition parties (EPDP) who said it was untrue and merely a ploy to alienate the community from the rest of the world. Seeds of suspicion towards outsiders (army soldiers, aid workers, visitors from the south and ‘our foreigners’) were already fairly well established with rumours of the spread of pornography, alcohol abuse and of course the ubiquity of accusations of spying. Rumours concerning such behaviour, which also included a loss of respect towards religion and social values as a whole, were all regularly debated and agonised over – especially concerns regarding the Tamil youth. Undoubtedly some of these rumours were well founded, making their refutation difficult and thereby serving only to confirm the more extreme apprehensions.

The climate of fear regarding outsiders has prevailed over the north for decades but it has also continued on into the cease-fire period. There is a fear among the militants that Tamils will continue to want to leave the north, especially with the greater freedom afforded the residents of Jaffna; the LTTE sent out an edict in 2004 that foreigners were to register with them. This was rumoured to be a measure against the possible smuggling of civilians out of the peninsula, particularly younger Tamils, which would seriously undermine the LTTE’s recruitment options.

Other rumours concerned the repercussions of disloyalty: the following apocryphal tale served as a warning to the business community, some of whom were suspected of being less committed to the Tamil cause. During the conflict, when it looked as though the Sri Lankan army would win the battle for Jaffna the government asked for donations from the business community for redevelopment; many businessmen put out public notices in the newspapers stating how much money they had given, undoubtedly to show their support for the victors. However the situation changed and it was the Tamil Tigers who re-took Jaffna. The LTTE visited each of those who had put advertisements in the newspapers and asked for these same donations to be handed over to them instead; and of course each businessman now knew that his name would be known and used for future 'donations'. This 'public transcript' acted as both warning of the consequences of both loyalty and betrayal (traitor or *throhi*) and remains an effective silencer through its continued retelling.

I was once warned by a Tamil Tiger cadre that army spies were everywhere and no-one was to be trusted and that I, as a foreigner could not know who was who and should therefore be wary. There is often a moral dimension to warnings, especially those meted out to women suggesting their particular vulnerability; there were stories of women living alone, who had been robbed and had their throats cut. Generally, talking on the street was discouraged. This nurtured belief in spying, informing and betrayal, which is both prevalent and powerful in the north and pervades many conversations and relationships teaches children to mistrust strangers and therefore they are seldom seen playing outdoors. Neighbourhood family allegiances and loyalties are now unknown and therefore suspect; it is claimed that every community harbours spies and many 'spy families' are said to be infiltrated into a neighbourhood in order to observe and report on local action. This is in marked contrast to before the war when neighbourhoods, although often structured and defined through caste affiliations, were more cohesive and cooperative.

Interestingly, being on a bicycle seemed to provide greater anonymity and I would frequently find myself approached by another cyclist who would engage in friendly conversation and questioning albeit briefly, before suddenly weaving off and disappearing down a side street. Sometimes they would even give quite unexpected

direct, personal opinions or comments concerning the situation in Jaffna; there was clearly some safety to be had from these brief encounters for anyone wishing to share their views, as well as ask questions. Certain spaces seem to confer safety and often in similarly unusual settings; along the Baltic coast in East Germany during the communist era for example, nudist beaches were renowned for providing greater safety and opportunities to talk about politically sensitive matters - as though the lack of clothing somehow ensured greater anonymity and that recording conversations would be impossible (Littlewood, personal communication).

There were many LTTE offices in Jaffna where complaints could be registered and assistance in resolving disputes requested; they acted as social arbiters of justice in a community where there was effectively little control or punishment for criminal activity. This role was often applauded for obvious reasons: law and order or rather lack of it, was becoming an increasing problem on the peninsula, but there were also rumours of the existence of many corrupt, wealthy business people who controlled the economic market in the north with impunity and with the apparent acquiescence of the Tigers. Despite this, tales abounded of the days when the Tigers had complete control of the peninsula prior to 1995; women in particular felt safer and more secure. Despite the fear of constant bombing they did not suffer the humiliation and degradation that occurred following the army's occupation, from 1996 onwards. This period of LTTE control is frequently evoked with nostalgia for a past that no longer exists; of days when people felt there was order and they could walk the streets late at night free of harassment, threat or attack. This view became so widespread that even in the south, many Sinhalese held the view that the Tigers were better at maintaining law and order than the Sri Lankan police force (Sunday Leader, 2004). This is another example of the public transcript, whereas in private there were complaints that they "sometimes go too far"; this was often said with a sense of ambivalence – indulged and excused because of the personal safety it provided for women, but also with a tone of disapproval, acknowledging the excessive use of force.

Discarded childhood

Due to the protracted nature of the war, its effects have been felt across the generations; all those born over the last thirty years have acquired their knowledge of the world through experiences of warfare, violence, and fear. For the older generation, having lived in times of relative stability in the north, it is hard to reconcile the changes witnessed among the youth population. They are confounded with a deep sense of unease over what appears to be an outbreak of aggression and hostility among a youth population brutalised through their inheritance.

Some of the worst abuses of war are said to have occurred among former child soldiers. Recent attention within the social sciences has focussed on the welfare of these children during and after conflict, and on the difficulties arising from their desensitisation towards violence and problems reintegrating into civilian life. A general sense of outrage exists as to the effects of involuntary conscription of children into fighting units, who are forced to engage in extreme acts of unimaginable violence. Brutalisation of child soldiers in Mozambique, has included their enforced participation in atrocities committed against their own families as a form of initiation that habituates them to killing – nothing would be demanded of them that was more pitiless than killing a member of their own family. They have been abused, often drugged as an aid to fighting and many have been killed. Subsequently, returning child soldiers are often ostracised by their families and communities who fear not only their violence, but also that of the angry dead who they killed and whose spirits are said to contaminate and pollute these children (Honwana 2005).

There are additional factors that posit agency for these children however and seek to reposition them away from universalised, one dimensional images of passive victimhood. Murphy (2003) has found that the enrolment of child soldiers in Liberia and Sierra Leone, is dependent not only on their coercion by the dominant militant forces and factions, but also must be considered in relation to a specific set of political, social and economic circumstances. This includes deprivation and the political marginalisation of young people who are then more likely to be drawn into, and find a place within these organisations. This is confirmed by Honwana (2005) from Angola and Mozambique

where the contrasting experiences that lead children into warfare, cannot be universalised within contested identities of 'child' and 'adult'. Rosen (2005) has studied groups of Sierra Leonean, Palestinian and Second World War Zionist youth fighters. He situates youth fighters within a socio-cultural and historical milieu that cites their involvement in war long before the advent of current concerns. Many have had no choice and join as a matter of survival; a child separated from family and community becomes an easy target of the state or oppositional forces, unless they join the insurgent forces. Revenge and patriotism as well as exploitation are common factors in joining a movement where a child either becomes a fighter or works in some other capacity within the organisation: as gun-runner, agent or servant. He also contends that in countries such as Sierra Leone, child soldiers have to be viewed against a backdrop of criminalisation within a state system that has itself contributed to the use of underage recruits in various spheres of underworld activity.

The term 'under age' as a universally applied concept, has little meaning in the context of societies where the attainment of adult status is marked at different ages and stages of life. Rosen cites the Cheyenne who initiate young men into adulthood at around the age of fourteen; the Dinka of Sudan at sixteen to eighteen and during the American Civil War - known as a "war of boys" (Rosen 2005:3), recruits were as young as twelve. Likewise in England in the seventeen hundreds, orphans and those from poor families, were received into the army as young as twelve. The separation of child soldiers from adult soldiers has had repercussions during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings in South Africa. Reynolds (2005) reports that former child soldiers are not recognised as 'soldiers', but rather as civilians and consequently, as 'victims' or 'perpetrators'. Many young people have refused to take part in the TRC hearings because it does not allow the fighters either recognition or a place or role within the achievements of the freedom struggle.

It is well known that among the LTTE there are 'underage' cadres. As well as those who were coerced, many joined voluntarily out of a sense of patriotism, revenge, security and economic necessity. As more middle class Tamil youths fled, their poorer more disadvantaged peers came to make up the majority of the fighters, escaping the deprivations of their lives in the rural north and east (correspondingly government army

recruits come from the depressed rural south). Idealism to the cause has been replaced by the necessity of deprivation and desperation. This is a phenomenon seen especially in the east of Sri Lanka and has given rise to resentment and probably contributed to the disaffection of the eastern LTTE leader Karuna, and his supporters. In the north, youngsters – mostly teenagers, are approached outside the schools and tuition classes for recruitment into the movement; there are a number of LTTE cadres studying and working in the university who also undertake to convince fellow students not only to join up, but also take part in demonstrations and actions such as the frequent ‘hartals’, protesting against actions or inactions on the part of the government.

For some there seems to be a tacit understanding that joining the Tamil Tigers entails probable death, and many join with this knowledge and intention in mind. The dismal realities of their lives against the possibility of, even for a brief period, admittance into a quasi-family and then finally a ‘heroic death’, is enticing (Somasundaram 1998). However, the next set of ‘dismal realities’ that greets them are the rigours of training and the harshness of a combatant’s life that for some is the point at which they wish to (but cannot) leave (Trawick 2002).

Whilst on one level many people are acutely aware of the reminders of the war that surrounded them on a daily basis, instilling fear and alarm; there are other aspects of life in which messages of warfare have been incorporated seemingly uncritically into daily life. Children are sold toy guns at festival times alongside real machetes and knives. Small children are sometimes seen clothed in replica army combat camouflage fatigues, their parents seemingly unaware of the connotations. Many copy (exercise) books for schoolchildren have pictures of military helicopters, gun ships, tanks and battle scenes on the cover. Film footage in the media showing scenes of brutality are common place – from the videoed beheadings of two journalists in Iraq, to the aftermath of a suicide bombing in Colombo in 2004. LTTE documentary videos are shown in public spaces during festivals, with graphic footage of campaigns that have been fought.

Tools that are common in domestic and work life have become transformed into symbols of violence; apart from machetes, farming pesticides have become mechanisms for suicide, bicycle chains and the spiked tail of a ray fish used to beat prisoners, the well to dispose of corpses and always, the ubiquitous oleander tree with its toxic berries.

Everyday objects have become an effective method of intimidation and a way of reminding and recalling memories of abuse and torture. During a visit to a village with some local NGO workers, who were assessing whether the inhabitants would benefit from regular visits to assist in setting up various community projects, we learnt that the night before one of the villagers had been murdered with a machete. After this altercation and in retaliation, the deceased's fellow villagers set fire to fifty houses in the perpetrator's village. It was said that the LTTE then arrived quickly and removed all the males from the second village, taking them to the Vanni for investigation and enquiry into the incident. This is a fairly typical example of how antagonisms quickly escalate into violent incidents within an atmosphere of fear, tension and suspicion. As stated however, aggression is not confined to the younger war generation; it finds itself embedded in social and work life where arguments break out easily, petty jealousies and rumours circulate causing great distress. Pressures on fractured and splintered families is immense and breaks out in various form through acts of violence and self-inflicted harm; increases in alcohol abuse have been noted among some sections of the populace along with worries about money and family responsibilities. All of which are now observable through their impact on the younger generation.

It should also be pointed out however, that there are many who have retained some stoicism in the face of such enormous odds. Many make and implement plans to transform their lives in a positive way through education, work training, and there are periods of enjoyment and pleasure to be had that have been long denied to the civilians of the north. Despite ongoing acts of violence, most people are relieved at not having to live in an atmosphere of open warfare. Whilst many Tamils support the idea that the only way of attaining freedom from southern hegemonic dominance and oppression is through severe methods, there is also a desire for a full return to a peaceful way of life with all the freedoms of movement and cohabitation. Many confirm that they have no particular argument with their southern Sinhalese neighbours, beyond ignorance of their plight as Tamils, but instead hold the tyrannical policies of the southern government as responsible for the miseries inflicted on them. Some have now had the opportunity to glimpse the world outside: one that promises greater material prosperity, the opportunity for education and travel. Against this is the concern about the risk of cultural and social

disintegration, but these are contradictions and dilemmas that face all Tamils, even the older generations who wish for their children to have equal opportunities with other young people abroad among the Tamil diaspora.

Chapter 6

The (dis)articulation of suffering

The 'problem' with language in a Tamil Sri Lankan context, is both an epistemological and political one. This is especially the case in a society that is suspicious of how outsiders define indigenous knowledge and the construction of meaning. There are risks in imposing ill-considered views when these views can pose a threat to the foundations of identity and its position within spheres of conflict. The scope of knowledge that is attainable is always in question with ethnographies away from home, and epistemological enquiries must acknowledge these limitations. In many respects this study is empirical in nature because it constitutes a view of uneasy post-war dynamics that relies on sensory experience and information more than through *a priori* knowledge or the ability of language to describe and portray suffering with sufficient depth or accuracy. Hence primacy is given to expressions of suffering that as already stated, employ other means; that is to say rituals that transcribe past experiences of pain on the body, and the current oppressions of civilian life in the north. Also how both public and private behaviour have become transformed through the perpetuation of violence even in the cease-fire period.

There have been significant contributions from medical anthropologists in the study of the language of pain and suffering within a context of violence. The inexpressibility of pain inscribed on the body through torture has been eloquently analysed by Scarry (1985) in her seminal work on torture and war. She contends that pain resists objectification through language, it transcends the language of the sufferer making an evocation of the experience impossible; the pain of torture deconstructs, unmakes and destroys language (p.20). Imprisonment and torture were endemic in the north and east of Sri Lanka especially after the mid-nineteen nineties when the army began occupation of these areas. Thousands disappeared following arrest; their whereabouts were never established and consequently many families have to live with that uncertainty, which has affected their ability to mourn.

One of the central doctrines of torture practise is the ownership of power and control through fear (Scarry 1985; Daniel 1996; Feldman 1991; Taussig 1984, 1992; Robben 2000). What makes torture so effective is this ability to instil fear and thereby destroy trust, confidence and a sense of self, as a demonstration of power over both individual and society – not by the individual torturer, but by his/her command authority. However, as Feldman (1991) has suggested, even within the space of the torture sequence there is a possibility for some assertion of control by the captive, paradoxically through the interrogatee's self-initiation and subversion of the torture act. But, the question is also whether some reclamation of control and authority are possible in its aftermath, for both the individual and their anguished community.

In torture, language is subverted through its insistence on meaningfulness by the torturer, which is both fictitious and entirely absent for the sufferer; there is no satisfactory outcome for either torturer or sufferer. Daniel (1996:) highlights this from his interviews with torturers in Sri Lanka: the torturer in seeking truth ultimately fails in his endeavour due to the absence of any possible 'truth' in this context. The 'truth' in fact, is his assertion of power over the individual, not the obtaining of useful or important information. S. Turner (1995) describes how torture and the employment of other means of silencing communities through the instillation of fear, means that people become reluctant to hold information that can be used against them in the future: knowledge, talk and acts of opposition become dangerous for the self and for others. The mere suggestion or threat of torture is sufficient to silence whole communities. The abusive skills of the torturer have also meant that the visibility of affliction has been lost, making its presence more easily deniable.

Concomitant with this instilled fear of language, is its potential to both betray and endanger the self; these two elements serve to restrain and lend suspicion to language so that it becomes a perilous liability. This is not only the case with torture, but also occurs in a society that has been silenced through fear and uncertainties about trust. In northern Sri Lanka, expressing and articulating opinion and critique poses huge risk; asking questions can easily incur suspicion and results in silence. In an atmosphere where trust is minimal, conversations tend to remain at a fairly safe and therefore superficial level, unless taking place among trusted individuals. In a society cognisant with the constraints

of colonialism and the hierarchies of the caste system with its strict codes of conduct, maintaining a cautious silence and avoiding controversy has some familiarity for northern Tamils. But this has changed in the face of covert surveillance and scrutiny and now exists through a mechanism of instilled fear. Infiltration by both army and militant groups is whole-scale. The army camps are not situated apart from the general population but instead, Tamil civilians live among what are effectively their captors; similarly various paramilitary offices are located in most village and town areas. This understandably increases fears of talking especially when lines are crudely drawn between terms of loyalty or disloyalty, friend or foe; dissonance therefore is rare.

As stated previously, there are seldom opportunities for meeting people individually and discussion of more controversial subjects does not often occur. This has repercussions for arranging to meet interviewees individually, which is considered unwise and incites comment: for the researcher this has enormous implications and renders interviews futile and redundant. I realised that to gain useful information safely, listening and language would have to be not so much substituted, but encoded through observations of performance activity.

Drama and the use of dramatic interpretation are familiar to most Tamils. I came across examples of how experience was transmitted through performative activity, rather than through verbal articulations and explanations; these would occur in a variety of both formal and informal settings. In group situations such as school/student programmes as well as more therapeutically based activities, drama was a preferred method of articulating a wide variety of social issues and can be identified as arising from ancient cultural forms of dance, poetry, music, theatre and religious ritual that continues into the present, as well as being adapted to the current setting of conflict. The LTTE for example, are known to use performance, songs, poetry and dance to propagate messages across village and town alike, and have opened a drama institute in Kilinochchi, the main urban centre within their territory. A college open day I attended in Jaffna gave a theatrical demonstration of the effects of the war on the civilian population that was at once vivid, shocking, frightening, moving and very effective in its portrayal of the insanity of war – more than any spoken or written words could convey, I suspect.

Despite a facility for performance, discussing problems is not an alien concept to the Tamils of northern Sri Lanka. In the past, within most villages there used to be an individual who was regularly sought out for her/his wisdom, insight and expertise; they would play a pivotal role in the resolution of both personal and local crises and conflicts among the inhabitants. This can be seen as a form of narrative that seeks to communicate and reach out through its articulation of significant life experiences (Ricoeur 1996). Narratives that belong largely in the public domain are defined by Gluckman (1963b) as “a sanctioned process, a social fact.....(that) helps maintain group unity, morality and history”. In societies where these concepts are constantly threatened and undermined, rumour, gossip and the use of euphemisms are likely to be a predominant feature. Following the destruction to so many villages, these individuals, along with their fellow inhabitants were dispersed and became silent without a settled, cohesive community in which to fulfill their role. Within this context, talking and confiding have become professionalised whereby strangers have assumed the role formerly taken by trusted, local village members.

Notions of confidentiality, privacy and individuality are linked to theories inherent in the process of counselling; they are not applicable in a context where verbal expression in the form of either narrative or gossip, are articulated and communicated through the group. Counselling can therefore be seen in this local context, to belong in the public domain and discussion of what takes place in the counselling sessions as public knowledge. Information deemed especially sensitive or private is not shared with outsiders therefore, only among a small network of close and trustworthy individuals; going ‘outside’ and recounting private information was deemed inappropriate, personal woes were contained within a close network of individuals, usually family and trusted friends and elders only. To discuss private issues with a stranger, and one from a different culture especially, would not be easily countenanced, unless one was driven to through isolation, loss of appropriate family and friends: all factors with high levels of probability in the north. It was also a time in which gossip and defamation was undermining the private lives of many in an atmosphere of tension, informing and suspicion. Consequently, local NGO workers seemed to have an awareness of these issues that directed their methods of intervention towards a more pragmatic approach and therefore greater success, especially

as they were not bound by rigid methodologies including time keeping structures – seen as an essential aspect of traditional western counselling.

In trying to find out how people were managing the intricate readjustments to life in the absence of war, I came across evidence of how healers and religious ceremonies generally supported the importance of local, culturally sensitive methods of managing distress. Through very different and complex performative acts, Tamil youths seem to have self-selected particular modes of expression out of personal needs that cannot be met through the channels of speech and language. I would suggest that they are both at some level, a challenge and operate against the dominant forces of oppression and the self-interest of those in power. There are factors common to both groups: the one is a ritualised performance that is silent, although graphic in its portrayal of a body under duress - reasons for undertaking this extreme vow remain private and are not vocally articulated. The other, takes place after dark in the absence of the rest of the community who are under virtual curfew in their homes; only the younger males are out at night where they seem to have complete control of the streets where they can act with impunity, as though in a theatre of their own making. There is no audience present to bear witness however, which makes their performances invisible - a form of shadow play, but one with the power to instil fear and provoke the imaginings and at times reality, of their performances. Stories of fights whereby injuries are so severe that the youth/patient has to be transferred to a Colombo hospital; a knife embedded in the skull following a re-enactment gone wrong; machetes and chains and knives: innocent tools by day, at night become transformed into weapons.

A pertinent factor in all this, is the all pervasive silence that endures throughout these ritualistic acts; the one spiritual and symbolic in nature, the other troubled and destructive to self and community: both comprise responses to violence. Whilst there is great awareness of the troubled youths in their midst and many conversations turn to accounts of incidents and fears, there is a genuine bafflement as to how to approach these youths and deal with this relatively recent phenomenon. There is also an element of tolerance within society; silenced and unable to articulate its own distress and significantly its anger, these protagonists act in some measure on behalf of society, articulating the anger that society is unable to.

Another mostly silent group are those who have chosen the more radical step of joining the movement. Following their enrolment, none will speak openly either whilst a member or even afterwards, having taken a vow of silence about any seemingly controversial positions with regard to the movement. Interviews with LTTE cadres elicit little in the way of unbiased information, tending to follow LTTE rhetoric in terms of externally managed and limited statements. To all intents and purposes, these individuals disappear from their families' lives; their names will change, their occasional visits will henceforth be accompanied by a fellow cadre to ensure nothing that contravenes LTTE rhetoric is spoken, and silence will pervade with regard to anything but the superficial.

It is virtually impossible to obtain accurate information or facts as to events both military and political in Sri Lanka due to the extreme levels of propaganda employed by all factions in the conflict. Statistical as well as qualitative information is distorted regarding the political negotiations for a resolution to the conflict. There is so much fear that even disappearances are often left unmonitored, unrecorded or unannounced for fear of further disappearances of other family members or some form of retribution, making acknowledgement of these acts impossible. Some aid agencies attempt to record and highlight disappearances and deaths but even they are often stymied in obtaining information.

The tidy divisions of victim and perpetrator, as well as the finality of relegating the past into some territory that no longer has purchase on social and political life, is reductive and precludes the ongoing status of those living within the uncertainties of life in the midst of changing social patterns and concerns. Many political narratives call on a remembered past where notions of 'legitimacy' are corralled in support of whatever cause through these historical memories, but instead only confuse further.

The Trauma Discourse: PTSD and social suffering

Those Tamils still living on the Jaffna peninsula have survived the experience of a protracted and bloody conflict, which has seen their families and lives ripped apart and their communities nearly destroyed. They have been dislocated, displaced and forced to

flee their homes at a moment's notice, leaving their belongings, their hard earned livelihoods and their homes. They have witnessed their relatives forced into exile never knowing when and if they would see them again, they have lived under constant threat, humiliation and fear over months and years, and have felt impotent and unheard by those in power who should have protected their rights and freedoms as citizens of Sri Lanka. Many people are at times pessimistic, angry and saddened and many suffer still, needing help to cope with their experiences. Against all of this, it is striking to observe how many have survived and been able to sustain themselves in the face of seemingly insurmountable conditions; trying to rebuild their communities, make plans for the future and move beyond the trauma of the past, despite the absence of a secure and appropriate setting for mourning.

In the face of such adversity it is easy to think exclusively in terms of 'trauma': an identity contained in a single reified image of suffering. The difficulty is however, that such a one-dimensional perspective does not recognise or allow for the multiplicity of concerns that inhabit life both during war, and into the present – concerns that are not wholly negative. There are many whose experience was of unrelenting violence and trauma, and there is little that can be regarded as positive in the outcome of this war – one still unresolved and with threats of the resumption of hostilities never far away. But there are also those who can recall a certain fellowship and resilience arising from adversity and of the cohesiveness that developed among formerly disparate groups. During the war, caste classifications were in many cases put to one side as people were thrown into confined living spaces – this was generally viewed as a positive repercussion of the conflict (Somasundaram 1998). Jaffna residents became very resourceful in their survival strategies and relied on greater co-operation between neighbours and friends. And whilst most have found the experience of warfare debilitating and shattering, it is for many ultimately unhelpful to focus exclusively on their experience of past trauma about which many feel impotent in 'coming to terms with' or addressing in a satisfactory way – especially when it remains so unresolved. Recovery is not the issue, but rather it is being able to continue with life in a sustainable and manageable way that is a necessity for most. It is outside, short-term perspectives that often perpetuate these images of passive suffering and victimhood, which serve no apparent purpose or benefit to those directly

and personally involved; they seldom reflect the self-image of those who have experienced and lived through war. These brief views aimed at identifying suffering not only fail to register other concerns of importance, but also do not acknowledge the everyday mundanity of life that continues during and after war that are none-the-less essential in the struggle to reintegrate and adjust to the constantly changing circumstances. They also ignore the capacity of those in settings of conflict to resolve and manage their distress, themselves.

Investigations of suffering and survival in sites of violence should acknowledge that remediation often takes place from within a recognised system or framework of understandings of causality and intercession. This construes an awareness of socio-cultural values relative to religion, institutional structures and power. In terms of informed experience, empirical studies argue that to understand the effects of violence, those with direct knowledge of conflict and its effects are those most adept at understanding and therefore managing its consequences. This is in direct contrast with the remotely informed strategies that imbue the work of some large international aid organisations who still take western notions of trauma and recovery and attempt to apply them in widely differing socio-cultural milieu and contexts. These projects are then more liable to fail, in large part due to a lack of understanding in relation to existing strategies that are used by recipient populations and their views of what constitutes efficacy. Each setting of conflict has its own unique means for dealing with experiences that have impacted on health and well-being. There is a diversity of methods informed by long experience and understood by consumers who seek from a variety of sources the answers to their interests. They know who to go to, when and in what circumstances and have developed new strategies for dealing with recent problems. Despite fears that local people involved in support and relief work are themselves 'too traumatised', this is largely disproved by the evidence of those undertaking these tasks who have provided their knowledge and expertise to great effect. They clearly state that they have the advantage of insider knowledge and an awareness of the conflict and the current needs of their villages. Something often absent in the far off capitals where planning and administration of international aid takes place and that leads to frustration among those who must implement these edicts.

Two local NGOs operating in the north, with whom I had regular contact, provided a wide variety of informed support throughout the peninsula. All of the workers were individuals who contributed their personal experiences of living through the conflict and also possessed the authority and insight concerning the nature of the problems with which they were confronted. These matters related to a wide variety of concerns: social, religious, familial, emotional and economic and were addressed through a variety of techniques and strategies that called for cultural awareness and appropriately applied interventions. A large percentage of the work carried out utilised locally sanctioned initiatives, whereby the recipients of support would articulate their needs and negotiate the best method of achieving them in conjunction with these workers. Local healers were often consulted and vice versa, many healers would also discuss village and individuals needs with these workers: cross-referring was commonplace.

Pathologising suffering

It is essentialising to suggest that 'local' – seldom adequately defined, communities are unable to manage their own trauma. It would also be condescending to suggest that these same communities are unaware of the existence of other theories, including (but not exclusively) western models of psychiatry and psychology. Countries such as Sri Lanka with a long history of colonial rule, have been familiar with these theories for as long as western countries, and are not limited by 'tradition' as a static entity. Diverse and multi-dimensional sources are utilised that transform and develop according to context and necessity. These dilemmas of 'local' or 'traditional' versus 'western' and 'modern' although largely redundant, are still encapsulated in the often controversial arguments concerning the use or misuse of the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Syndrome (PTSD/S). Below I attempt to set out some of the arguments and offer an alternative exemplar that supports the strength of communities under enormous duress, to advocate for themselves through the harmonious application of *varied* theories. Again it appears it is often the language that confuses and alienates rather than the practical application of

the terms; labeling has powerful effects and it is this that I consider to be damaging rather than the work being done to alleviate suffering - especially by local NGOs.

The problem seems to lie with disease oriented paradigms, especially ones that seek to define traumatic experience through diagnostic categorisation such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There has been much debate lately on the usage of terms such as 'trauma' and PTSD as they relate to the suffering and distress of individuals and societies caught in the cross-fire of war from the Balkans to the Middle East to Sri Lanka (Young, 1995; Bracken, 1999; Eisenbruch, 1991; Fabrega, 1993; Littlewood, 2002; Summerfield, 1995, 1999, 2001). Suarez-Orozco and Robben (2000) assert that usage of the term PTSD decontextualises and negates the experience of trauma and suggest that the "hegemony of the PTSD concept" (p.21) has been so enormous that scientific enquiry has neglected the study of the collective effects of violence in favour of individualised treatments. Support for this point has perhaps most forcefully been proposed by Bracken (1999) and Summerfield (1999, 2001) who argue that most western biomedical nosologies such as PTSD, depression, anxiety are inappropriate when applied in many conflict settings due to their 'ethnocentricity' and lack of recognition of cultural concepts relating to local perceptions of what constitutes health, sickness and how conflict can be resolved. I would suggest that it is the language of such terms that is alienating rather than the concept of suffering, which is universal. Anyone unfamiliar with psychiatric or psychological terms finds the language applied to subjective experience frequently alienating and incomprehensible. This also applies to some of the techniques used in managing these experiences: British veterans of the First World War report having found the idea of discussing their trauma with a stranger both unfamiliar and uncomfortable; they admitted however, to having derived great comfort from sharing experiences with fellow veterans. There remains a huge divide between the providers and users of mental health services, but greater success seems to have been achieved through self-advocating groups such as Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous and groups run by and for people who hear voices. Whilst these groups have their own set of labels, they at least are created from within, rather than imposed from without.

Attention has to be paid to the risk of 'normalising' expressions of suffering however, as they can ignore the terror of lived experiences of violence. Kleinman (1996) suggests that

the pathologisation and individualisation of trauma can be considered inappropriate in view of the kind of suffering and violence much of the world undergoes on a chronic, daily basis. He states that such experiences cannot therefore be said to lie 'outside normal human experience', one of the defining categories of PTSD. I would argue however, that whilst it is true to say that much of the world lives in a state of ongoing repetitive violence, this is open to misunderstanding and in fact perilously close to relegating collective suffering to a condition of 'normality' by Kleinman's definition; whilst it may be wide-spread and all pervasive, it is none-the-less far from 'normal', which also suggests 'acceptable'. The abnormality of mass suffering needs to be recognised and highlighted, but at the same time analysis of the effects of PTSD labels and diagnoses are necessary. So whilst labeling can be seen to be unhelpful, at the same time there has to be a way of illuminating an experience that can be universally comprehended without stigmatisation. Phenomenological studies of embodiment provide perhaps the best and most eloquent means for this within a context of such overwhelming suffering.

The problem that occurs within current biomedical discourse, is that the construction of PTSD pathologises suffering, signifying it as a state of abnormality or dysfunction that requires outside intervention. These treatments seek to rectify a disturbance within the psychological or emotional system, thereby re-establishing order and eliminating chaos, at the same time attempting to uphold a state of 'mental health', a concept that to this day, no-one has been able to either accurately or satisfactorily define – perhaps another instance of Douglas' (1966) notion of danger from pollution, requiring the containment of an authoritarian medical discourse that subjugates chaos and creativity. To have nightmares, flashbacks, despair, tension, irritability and a problem in forming and maintaining relationships should be the anticipated outcome of deep distress and a natural response to extreme experiences, which then requires considerable support and understanding. So whilst not 'normalising' suffering, pathologising is also unhelpful. What many people working in anthropology, psychiatry, psychology and/or sociology acknowledge is that PTSD is sometimes an unhelpful label to attach to people reacting in a wholly comprehensible way to extreme and adverse conditions. A label of PTSD, by attaching pathological status to these natural responses, serves only to contribute to the multitude of readjustments that have to be made by the sufferer. There are undoubtedly

forms of 'malignant PTSD', but this condition should not be equated or confused with those experiences of an individual under extreme duress and currently often classified under the rubric of PTSD within the medical establishment.

Jones (2003), having worked for many years as a child psychiatrist in the sphere of post-war recovery, has described the responses and reactions of children living through war in Bosnia in the mid-nineteen nineties and discovered that those most resilient to the experience of war did not identify talking as particularly helpful but preferred instead to look towards the future and concentrate their efforts on the reconstruction of their home, community, landscape and the reunification of their family. This was carried out in ways that were wholly in keeping with the world view of the child – through play, art, drama and story telling. They all reacted to the pain and distress around them with nightmares, difficulties in concentrating but as she points out these are rational responses to war, not pathological abnormalities. Punamaki (2000) has observed that research often ignores the tendency of humans to strive towards some understanding of their experiences, including the most distressing, and instead focuses on the premise that people are passive victims. In fact most people she contends, attempt both individually and collectively to understand events and feelings through creatively strengthening means.

Diagnoses of PTSD generally reflect an individualistic perception that ignores the collective suffering of entire communities. Consequently, a diagnosis of PTSD immediately segregates and separates the sufferer from others around them, it gives the message to the self and the community that there has been a failure to manage and face up to experiences that others around them have 'coped' with whilst their own response is seen as inadequate. This is undermining and unhelpful and ultimately silencing – to admit to any experiences which might suggest a pathological state could be construed negatively and must therefore be kept silent, denied for fear of being labelled 'ill' or 'disordered'. Fabrega (1993) is critical of the use of psychiatric diagnoses as they can be stigmatising and used as a label for 'deviant' conduct and as a way of controlling people and their behaviour. He contrasts this with the use of diagnostic categories used in medicine and surgery, where the diagnosis is a statement both "*on the self and of the self*" (p. 167; authors italics), whereas in psychiatry it is about the self. He claims this is

brought into sharp focus for clinicians who work holistically and are confronted with the institutional aspects of labelling and control.

Socio-cultural implications of PTSD diagnoses

Good (1992:181) writes of the “extraordinary paradigm shift” that has taken place within the field of psychiatry in North America. He refers to the change in emphasis from a psychoanalytic approach to a biological one, which he asserts may relate to a disinterest in the cultural and social elements of health. He suggests this can provide an opportunity for medical anthropologists to study the role of culture and psychiatry.

What of entire populations who have suffered the traumatic effects of violence and loss? The vast majority of the inhabitants of the north and east of Sri Lanka were exposed to extreme events taking place in their midst and lived in a state of “collective suffering” (Somasundaram 1998) over decades; this transformed lived experience into one of daily, chronic violence from which it has been difficult for some to readjust and give up expectations of, and reactions to, violence. When expressions of distress and suffering become pathologised and psychologised however, they often employ the notion of a split mind and body; separate entities that require separate interventions.

Young (1995) has questioned the use of diagnoses of PTSD towards Vietnam veterans; although he does not deny the existence of the distress relating to the extreme events of war, he does question the treatment methods used that do not take sufficient account of the political and economic circumstances surrounding the issue of veterans. His research in a Veterans’ Administration hospital looked at how therapies such as psychodynamic psychotherapy and cognitive therapy were used to identify a traumatic event or memory and thereby bring an awareness of how this trauma had caused the behavioural and anti-social disruptions in the veterans’ lives. The therapy interventions were presumed to lead that individual to an understanding of the traumatic event or memory before processing it into the conscious mind. In the instance of the Vietnam War, the returning soldiers were made individually accountable, and ‘ill’ for their so-called ‘deviant behaviour’, rather than examining the political system that sent them to a futile war in the first place. Young has written extensively on the subject of PTSD and in particular the role played by time

and causality. He argues that it is difficult to identify a universal definition of what is a traumatic event, when such events are often reacted to in a variety of unique ways by different individuals. He identifies the origins of 'traumatic memory' from the work of Freud, Charcot and Janet on psychogenic 'shock', which was taken up and developed by clinicians until it entered the official nosology as 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder', the advent of which coincided with the identification of compensation as well as treatment, for Vietnam War Veterans. (Without its emphasis on time – a 'post' traumatic event leading to and causing the onset of symptoms, PTSD is not very different from other syndromes).

How therefore is one to first conceptualise and then anticipate the outcome of responses to distress? Is personality important or the socio-political milieu in which the event takes place, or the position/role one has? For example in a war situation tolerance of traumatic events is different to in peacetime, but also what defines peacetime? During the cease-fire period in Sri Lanka, the experiences of Tamils in the north and east could not be said to constitute any reasonable understanding of peace, or freedom from fear or confidence in the future. The same applies in countries such as Iraq where pronouncements made by the British and American states informed the world of the successful outcome of the war, suggesting some form of closure or finality. However, as is now apparent there is continuing violence and loss comparable to anything that occurred during the war, as delineated by external governments. The role each person has in the event is also significant: militant or non-combatant/civilian. How does army or militant training influence the ability of the soldier or cadre to tolerate trauma as opposed to the ordinary citizen? Amongst the militants, training involves removal of the individual from family and village as an essential component in breaking emotional and physical bonds connecting the cadre to his or her former life with all its attachments and contested loyalties. Civilians however, maintain their connections and loyalties to family and neighbour, which in some measure reduces their capacity to inflict harm on others and leads to healthier readjustment after conflict; unlike paradoxically, the combatants. There are frequent reports in Sri Lanka of the problems ex-militants and ex-army soldiers have in readjustment to non-combat mode (Somasundaram 1998). Although welcomed back in most circumstances there is also some fear of these individuals, which is exacerbated by

their often easy recourse to anger and their continued adherence to the movement above and beyond their own kin. Consequently, they often have problems fitting into their former village communities and there are reports of former child militants behaving aggressively in school and disrupting village social groups (Save the Children Fund, personal communication, 2004). Their indoctrination to violence separates them from others and their experiences alienate them from former friends and family. This has also been found in Guatemala, Mozambique and Sierra Leone where the readjustments for soldiers and their families and communities are complex and often unsuccessful (Honwana, 2005; Green, 2004; Rosen, 2005).

Turner and Gorst-Unsworth (1998) have examined the consequences of torture and violence from a psychological, physiological and sociological perspective. They refer to common symptoms described by survivors of the effects of torture, as follows:

“...Impaired memory, and concentration, headache, anxiety, depression, sleeplessness with nightmares and other intrusive phenomena, emotional numbing, sexual disturbances, rage, social withdrawal, lack of energy, apathy, and helplessness”. (p.475)

They suggest that the difficulties of social re-adjustment have a more important role in the well-being of torture survivors, than descriptions of symptoms that do not identify the complexities of adjusting to peace-time. They assert that diagnoses of PTSD are inadequate in terms of the context of people's lives which are dominated by loss, discrimination and misunderstanding. Summerfield (1999, 2001) discusses the current western trend to medicalise and psychologise life events where once religion dominated our quest for explanations about the world. I would suggest that elements from both have been incorporated into Tamil Sri Lankan discourses on suffering and health and are the result of four hundred of years of exposure to western colonialism that attempted but ultimately failed, to change Sri Lankan views of science over religion. Instead there has been an integration of the two that does not preclude one necessarily from the other. Science and religion seem to reside quite adequately side by side, something noticeable within the local NGOs: whilst working with western informed techniques, workers do not

lose sight of their own indigenous social and cultural practices and have been able to integrate one with the other without either tension or contradiction.

Like Turner and Gorst-Unsworth, Summerfield advocates the need for our understanding of the resilience of people if they have the social support necessary in order to promote a form of collective cohesion. If social capacity has been undermined and damaged, then new systems have to be established, but at the behest and directive of the community itself. War has a huge impact on the life-styles of those resident in these settings; including kinship connections, rites of birth and death, all of which are often disrupted if not destroyed by the incidence of violence and conflict. In countries such as Sudan and Mozambique many long-established practices have ceased due to entire villages fleeing from civil war; the legacy is a people struggling to find ways of mourning their lost relatives because of their inability to carry out appropriate rites. The long-term consequences of this are devastating and it is often young people who are directly caught up in these conflicts who have the most problems readjusting to lives from which they feel alienated and disconnected.

In Tamil society 'mental illness', as defined through the conventions of a biomedical discourse, remains a fearful abstraction that implies a failing not only for the individual but also for their family, prompting a sense of shame that is shared among members of the kin group. This is likely to discourage openness because of its negative associations - a reflection that goes beyond the individual concerned (Somasundaram and Sivayokan, 2000).

Views about well-being arise from the strong link between Tamil religious teachers - Hindu gurus such as Navalur, and Christian priests - and the extensive and varied community of practitioners such as oracles (*vaakku cholluthal*), astrologers, horoscope and palm readers. They are sought for advice and help in matters of spiritual and social well-fare and to obtain knowledge and learning concerning religious, family and educational aspects of life. Both Hindus and Christians, as well as consulting healers also accommodate their differing religious faiths under the rubric of fate, cosmology, the chanting of mantras, singing *bhajan* (holy songs) and studying the writings of the saints and poets. The emphasis is on explanations of cause with reference to cosmology and the role of the Gods in both earthly and past life and the teachings of sages. This is followed

by recommendations of restorative remedies and practices such as propitiations made to particular deities or saints. There is no formal diagnosis as such; the problem is sometimes (but not always) identified and according to the particular methods of the healer, a specific remedy or action is suggested. Some healers are in a trance state when they communicate with their devotees and it is the deity who 'speaks' through the healer; this ensures privacy and protection for healer and devotee; the healer being ostensibly unable to remember what occurred. This is held in complete trust by all concerned; there is no suspicion as to the likelihood of the healer passing on information – their entire reputation depends on this, and only those convinced of this reveal secret or sensitive information. The healing takes place in the setting of home, temple, church or local community center, which have less stigma than the hospital – especially in respect to problems of personal anguish. No labels are attached, whereas concepts such as karma, spirit possession, fear, worry and sadness are all incorporated into local understandings with which each person is familiar, and which utilises both western and Tamil concepts. In contrast, the language of labels such as 'PTSD' are new, strange and incomprehensible, especially in its linguistic (English) and acronymic form.

Interventions that do not consider or recognise the value, strength and authority of local knowledge risk at worst, extending the devastation and at least, perpetuating misguided efforts that impose doctrines and methods alien to the people for whom they are intended.

Aid organisations and peace building

'Peace-building' has become one of the key terms in strategies for providing assistance to war-torn countries. Both International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and local NGOs are seen as the main instigators of these activities, but as Neubert (2004) suggests, this has inherent short-comings. By not addressing the structural elements of the conflict-in-progress, the antagonism of militant and military leaders with an alternative agenda is in conflict with the requirements for stable governance. The days of aid being about delivering food and blankets to the victims of famine are gone and the age of increasing engagement and involvement in local as well as national politics has arrived

within the context of complex and antagonistic conflicts. As evidenced in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and elsewhere, questions of 'position' become unavoidable despite the denial of the aid organisations, who describe themselves as apolitical (Bastian 1998).

Wickramasinghe (2001) has written of the complex issues surrounding the discourse on development aid and human rights in countries such as Sri Lanka, where new transnational networks are changing the cultural and economic order. Fears concerning the partiality of aid organisations towards the LTTE, and by implication the loss of state sovereignty, are a major preoccupation among the state media and many southern politicians including the politicised *Bhikkus* in Sri Lanka. They are variously described as "vultures living off the sufferings of others" (p.152), to being supporters of terrorism and there is little differentiation between local and international organisations in this, according to Wickramasinghe. At least fifty international NGOs are operating in the capital, Colombo with many more local NGOs reliant on funding from international sources. During the height of the war in the 1990s, it was reported that approximately between 20,000 and 30,000 grassroots organisations existed in Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe 2001) comprising fishermen, widows, youth groups and assorted villagers.

As the aid agenda leans increasingly towards 'psychosocial rehabilitation' over practical assistance, subjectivity becomes more pertinent than ever – when talking/counselling concerning war trauma is the main occupation of aid agencies, suspicions are easily aroused between communities. Neubert states that these aid agencies have as their modus operandi a human rights agenda in which "reconciliation and healing" (p. 47) are essential components and follow notions of western, democratic society. The types of conflicts confronting many international NGOs have changed since the end of the cold war. Classifications of wars and conflicts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries involve a multitude of complex configurations and there is little clarity in positions of 'rights' – peace builders may have to negotiate with outlawed factions who have perpetrated gross human rights violations and risk becoming embroiled in the objectives of particular political factions. Criticism of a tolerance towards crime has arisen more recently in Sri Lanka: the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and the Norwegian peace brokers have become heavily criticised in the southern state owned media, for their

apparent toleration of acts of violence that contravene the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) and there have been many calls for them to be withdrawn, especially from the JVP and JHU, who fear the loss of state sovereignty. There are accusations of a 'culture of impunity' that is said to prevail regarding the actions of the LTTE, but according to the Tamil Tigers they also claim the SLA have been allowed to perpetrate crimes against their cadres – with impunity, and there is growing discontent and suspicion towards Norwegian attempts to tread the difficult path of keeping both parties involved in the peace process.

It has been argued that the arrival and participation of these international aid organisations is a form of neo-colonialism or "neo-orientalism" (Stirrat, 1999:70) that affects power relations at a national as well as local level (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002). The politics of reciprocity is acute in Sri Lanka and has created subdivisions within society between providers and 'beneficiaries' of aid, and a hierarchy of employed locals who are given higher status through their contact with the 'internationals' (a term used by foreign aid workers to describe themselves) – all terms which evoke a colonial, paternalistic past that is divisive through the creation of positions of advantage (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002). With the arrival of large numbers of international aid organisations in Jaffna, social hierarchies and local economies have changed. All of the INGOs employ a small number of workers from the international community, the rest comprise local Tamils in relatively well-paid jobs, contrasting with local employment salaries. They have also contributed, along with the impact of foreign Tamil financial support and investment, to changing local economics through increased affluence for many, but also with rising property prices.

Considerable financial costs go towards maintaining the organisation itself including salaries, vehicles, properties (both offices and foreign aid workers homes, replete with security personnel) and other allowances. There was evidence of increased status for those Tamils working in the aid organisations through access to commodities such as aid vehicles, a new-found affluence that enabled an improved life-style as well as access to the otherwise fairly invisible 'internationals'.

Local NGOs on the other hand, whilst funded by large international aid organisations, did not have the same kudos, financial benefits or access to 'perks' such as four-wheel drive

vehicles. They often had to struggle to maintain their access to funding because of a requirement to provide evidence of the attainment of goals set by the organisation far away in a foreign country - even in the face of local knowledge and expertise that might otherwise suggest better and alternative methods for providing the most effective and viable assistance to local communities. The threat of a withdrawal of funding was ever present and made forward planning difficult and the most effective use of the money was not always possible because of this. Rarely did opportunities present themselves for local leaders of these NGOs to discuss and be involved at a higher level of programme planning and implementation: mostly, information was filtered down, from a distance^{lxii}. However, there were exceptions to this from organisations that did give greater independence locally for decision-making and instigation of projects, as well as management of funds. These were generally more positively viewed and were trusted as having less of a neo-colonial agenda.

Relationships between Tamil NGO workers and their international aid worker colleagues, were cordial but among locals generally there were occasions of suspicion concerning their political allegiances, but perhaps more so their behaviour. Due to the limited social contact between the two groups, understanding between them was often built on misconceptions. As I rarely spent time in the company of the international aid workers (and therefore have limited insight into their world), this afforded me a slightly better view of local exegeses regarding the perceptions of the international aid workers. Outside perceptions were obtained through distant contact and remote involvement – most foreigners were seen only in their aid vehicles. One aid worker stated that relationships were discouraged within her organisation in case of ‘over involvement’ and a loss of ‘impartiality’. Many local views conformed to stereotypical notions of ‘otherness’: fears of the influence and spread of promiscuity, pornography and alcohol use, as well as fears of spying would temper their perceptions and interactions with foreigners. Despite this there were some opportunities for people within both groups to meet and become friends, this was particularly the case with foreign workers who showed an interest in life beyond their compounds.

Challenges to the notion that indigenous health care workers are too emotionally ‘vulnerable’ or traumatised to work within their own communities of war have recently

been more forthcoming (Summerfield 1999). This appeared to be the case in the north of Sri Lanka, where local health care workers seemed able to manage their own needs alongside those of their affected community. Some of the international staff expressed frustration with the rejection of offers of counselling, something that has been identified as a local 'need' by foreign aid organisations abroad. Unfortunately, less time has been spent on examining how or even whether western based models of 'psychosocial rehabilitation' can and should be applied in the context of communities with diverse value systems and contrasting settings: definitions of what constitutes 'psycho-social rehabilitation' are as broad as concepts of 'traditional healing'. Care has to be taken in who provides this kind of support – foreign health workers who do not speak the local language are at risk of gross misunderstandings through mistranslations. When violence lurks just below the surface and is easily triggered by seemingly mundane events in every day life, unwitting counsellors could invoke huge dangers to a community in which talking is dangerous and where spying – sometimes real and sometimes imagined, has silenced the majority of the population as an act of self-preservation and protection. There have been articles written about the challenges for translators and counsellors working with traumatised clients in psycho-social counselling (Tribe 1999), which highlight some of the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in such work. Political and social allegiances and affiliations inevitably arise within the context of therapy/counselling where talking about events that have occurred in war settings can be ambiguous in the extreme. Trust does not necessarily arise out of familiarity and time only: if anything the relationship can become more problematic over time when views come increasingly to the surface having been encouraged within an atmosphere of open expression of feelings and emotion. As Somasundaram (2003:10) has pointed out "The aid workers may trample all over traditional beliefs and customs. In the long-term this may prove more deadly to the community than the war itself". He advocates a systemic approach that takes into account the wishes of the local Tamil community, which thereby avoids the trampling of local 'beliefs' and simultaneously renders the community more active in its own recovery.

PART III: THE ARTICULATE BODY

Chapter 7

Mediating adversity

Within the cramped, dark, stifling interior of Kannan's 'office', the desk is covered with ragged papers, books, some coins, betel leaves and *vibuthi* (holy ash) spread over most of its surface. The walls show many certificates, pictures of deities and photographs of Kannan's deceased parents; he is seated behind his desk awaiting the next supplicant from a long line of patient individuals and small groups outside. He is an elderly man wearing a green and orange *vesti*, his hair is shaven off and a sacred thread tied around his head; the horizontal *vibuthi* marks are smeared across his forehead, upper arms and chest, and his fingers are white from the many applications of *vibuthi* he has bestowed upon his devotees. Outside, the long queues of people wait to receive his advice, guidance, assistance and reassurance; they have come from across the peninsula to this Krishna temple to see him.

Kannan is respected as a *vaakku cholluthal* and well known for his insight and exceptional powers cited through having raised a woman from the dead, changed the colour of flowers from red to white, and as a person who even the sceptics admit "has something". The temple itself is large, freshly and colourfully painted with many large sculptures of Lord Krishna and his favoured consort: Radha. Kannan appears mildly distracted although welcoming: it was earlier explained to me by an attendant that the night before a thief had broken into his home and stolen a large sum of money. He later reassures us when we offer sympathy that he has "seen" the thief in a vision, now knows his face and knows his money will be returned when the time is right. The long line of expectant supplicants who come each Tuesday and Friday (he also sees people outside these sacred days) request his advice and help; presenting him with their personal tragedies, stories, dilemmas and fears for him to provide guidance. I watch as he speaks

to a couple who have come with their small sick child and he murmurs brief but reassuring words and invokes them to carry out certain acts of *bhakti* (devotion) within their village temple and they withdraw respectfully after a short time. He is obliging and used to requests not only from devotees but also visitors who are eager to understand and learn about his work, his reputation having spread wide. Initially, he was keen to speak about his knowledge of bio-medicine, seeming to incorporate this knowledge with his own expertise in the spirit world by referring to anatomical areas of the body that are vulnerable to bad spirits. I suspected this was mostly for my benefit as a westerner, but soon he began talking of the problems he saw in his work, which comprised mostly social, familial or business difficulties rather than medical or psychological ones and related to future concerns, rather than the past: it is rare to hear people ponder on the past - the uncertain and troubled future is more pressing.

Health seeking behaviour falls into three categories according to Kleinman's (1980) definition: popular, folk and professional. The problem with such definitions is that by segregating into categories, they can appear to undermine the efficacy and seriousness of many ancient, successful methods and approaches that do not necessarily conform to western notions of diagnosis, treatment and therapy. There have been discussions and debates concerning the 'professionalisation' of traditional healers (WHO, 1978; Last, 1990) that appears to seek to integrate them into the more 'acceptable' face of biomedicine. The bureaucratisation of healers, with certificates and training that incorporates western models shows a lack of understanding concerning cultural context. This is especially the case with practitioners who work in the spiritual realm such as spirit mediums, exorcists and oracles who engage with their sufferers at a metaphysical level and it would be difficult to see how they could operate within the strictures of biomedical discourse and practice.

In this context, the necessity for some form of explanation and recourse to positive change has become crucial in many respects, not only in health but also in providing explanations of what has happened and why, and importantly what will happen in the future. Within an atmosphere of extreme uncertainty and in the absence of tangible explanations from those in authority, many have turned to practitioners who are intermediaries between this world and the world of the gods and goddesses. They act as

spirit guides/mediums who can shed light on the causes and provide explanations of suffering, as well as provide suggestions on how to placate the angry deities. This is not a new phenomenon, but rather an increasing one.

The explanations being sought have extended to the location of missing relatives (Lawrence 1998); evidence of this comes not only from Sri Lanka, but also from other countries recovering in the aftermath of war where huge losses have occurred. People seeking the whereabouts of remains of those killed in the conflict, do so in order to complete a process of mourning and recovery. During the war in Vietnam thousands of Vietnamese died and were either buried in unmarked graves or remained missing. This left behind a vacuum of answered questions for relatives who were unable to proceed satisfactorily with their lives without identification of these mortal remains. This process is hindered without the physical manifestation of the body and until it is located, identified, and the appropriate burial ceremonies performed, the living family members exist with a sense of deficiency and incompleteness, and also the fear of their deceased relatives' restless spirit. Without access to forensic equipment or DNA testing to locate bodily remains, the government is unable to undertake the huge task of reassuring these families by locating and identifying the missing soldiers. In North Vietnam, government employed psychics assist relatives (and the government) in this process: acting through the guidance of the spirits of these deceased soldiers, they help locate and identify the bodies lying within unmarked graves or in areas of land where known battles have incurred heavy losses. This has offered solace to families of the missing soldiers and at the same time, provided the government with evidence of their involvement and efforts in identifying and assisting these families (BBC report, 2006). In this instance, recovery has been sought and attained through explanations and actions that comply with local knowledge; the physical manifestation or representation of bodily matter has led to resolution for many.

Both Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists incorporate the actions of various deities and demons from their respective religions into daily life. Christians (both Tamil and Sinhalese) also incorporate without conflict different ideas and practices that relate to notions of fate and cosmic influences on well-being. There are several extensive analyses from the anthropological literature on the work of personal and collective methods for

dealing with conflict in relation to the war in Sri Lanka: Kapferer 1997; Lawrence 1998, 2000; Perera S. 1995. They provide detailed accounts that integrate the role of cosmological explanations within the experience and context of war. Last (1999) has also written of the healing process of a community coming to terms with the aftermath of violence in Nigeria, demonstrating the strength of the community in overcoming trauma through its own internal workings that utilise local concepts of what constitutes a restoration to 'health'. But what happens in the uncertain spaces of a cease-fire that often feels only a temporary gap between wars? How else can a population, fearful of each other and the outside world find some safe way of articulating their suffering both from the past and on into a fearful future?

As has been described, local knowledge and interconnected systems of culturally sanctioned practice create an understanding between those who can 'heal' and their devotees. Trust is established by reputation, and by the common experiences that ensure an understanding of the dilemmas that are presented. There is a degree of privacy in disclosure - especially to the oracles, who do not remember the communications of their spirit guides, and oracular sessions often take place outside the earshot of others ensuring safety – so essential in a community living under occupation and under surveillance.

Ensuring protection from harm

The house is open to breezes through its glassless windows and air vents in the walls; during the day the doors remain open, but are shut at night. Escaping from the searing temperature outdoors large snakes and spiders, poisonous millipedes and sundry other creatures seek the shade and coolness of the interior. At night everyone sleeps on mats on the cool tiled floor, but getting up in the pitch dark can startle these usually docile intruders who then show their venomous tendencies. One night a scorpion stung the toe of Amma, while she was getting water for her thirsty daughter. After a night of agony, she visited a local elderly Ayurvedic doctor who is skilled in the use of the '*Gautri Mantram*' (a special chant from the *veda*) and possesses special powers of sight that enable him to use this vision to cure snake bites and scorpion stings. For two or three

minutes he looks with intense concentration at the affected area before gently and slowly stroking her ankle with a downwards motion to draw out the venom. After returning home she reports feeling improved: a friend who works at the local hospital later relates how many people are hospitalised because of scorpion stings and marvels at her rapid recovery.

The local oracles (*vaakku cholluthal*) in the north do not make public their proclamations, unlike their counterparts in eastern Sri Lanka (Lawrence, 1998. 2000). A measure of privacy and secrecy is maintained within the healing session: either there is a separate room in which devotees are seen, or in public gatherings each devotee is separated usually by mounting a small platform on which the oracle stands and where he or she can listen to whispered proclamations out of hearing of the other supplicants. Apart from this, the oracle's trance state automatically confers privacy, because he/she claims to be unable to remember what the deity has said. In some cases the oracle makes their promulgations without any prior requests being made by the devotee, which also affords a high degree of privacy, confidentiality and safety.

Because I wanted to look at where expressions of distress were to be located, I initially spent time visiting healers based on the peninsula, some of whom had become locally renowned and were respected for their ability to offer comfort and support. The most prevalent healers were *vaakku cholluthal*, astrologers, *kai parththal* (palm readers), *manthiravathikal* (Shamans) most of whom were based in temples or their own homes where they had built a shrine. It was here that supplicants and devotees attended on Tuesdays and Fridays – auspicious days in the Hindu calendar, to make their requests or recount their dilemmas. Special *pujas* may be performed, specific to the *pey* (ghost) or malevolent spirit troubling the individual, as well as predictions and readings. Some use plants (*mulihai*) to treat ailments ranging from snake bites to evil eye, whilst others resort to beating the evil spirits out (Somasundaram and Sivayokan 2000). Many use a variety of skills in providing spiritual guidance and assistance out of benevolence, but others are out to make money from the unfortunate. Their supplicants come from diverse sections of the community: rural, urban Tamils from differing castes and classes, religions, professions - including many psychosocial workers from the local NGOs. Also a growing number of exiled Tamils return to seek guidance and advice from these healers. In many

instances these temples have become wealthy, enabling further temple construction and the foundation of orphanages, schools, wedding halls and other projects of social benefit to the village.

I visited a locally renowned *chollu vaakkuthal* living and working in a village on the borders of the High Security Zone (HSZ). This village is renowned for its large number of temples – seven, and the fact that it is located in the vicinity of a large army base and prison camp, notorious and feared both during the war and to this day. Many of the village inhabitants have witnessed intense periods of fighting and many more have been displaced; those who have recently returned report its changed character and the loss of their original *ur* (translated as ‘village/town’, but also incorporating notions of ‘home’ or ‘roots’) although efforts are being made to re-establish a sense of community.

Shanthi: *vaakku cholluthal* ^{lxiii}

The *vaakku cholluthal* Shanthi had gained a considerable reputation during the war years for her ability to make honest and accurate prognostications in a wide variety of spheres including health, business fortunes and she was said to possess exceptional powers. This reputation had spread far and wide with many Tamils visiting her temple from abroad during the cease-fire period. It was said locally, that the majority of her devotees came from outside the peninsula now – probable because of the huge numbers who had had to flee from this area. She also makes a yearly visit to the U.K to perform oracular healing sessions, and claims to have cured a man recently of a severe skin complaint that western doctors had failed to treat successfully. She had accrued considerable wealth over the years through the donations of grateful adherents and had contributed to her local village community by building a school and an orphanage. The temple itself had been developed and extended to include a new sacred temple tank (*kulam*) and an extended *gopuram* (temple tower) was under construction.

Shanthi comes from an affluent *Vellala* family and most of her relatives are educated, working as engineers and doctors, but her path has been very different: it was acknowledged early within the family that she had special gifts and abilities. When she

was seven years old she began having frequent fainting spells and was taken to see many western trained and Ayurvedic doctors, none of whom could offer a cure. She was told to go to the temple and pray, so she started praying to Amman (the Mother Goddess). One night she dreamt that a *nagapambu* (cobra) spoke to her and told her she should come to this particular site where the temple now stands, in three days time; she duly followed this request and saw the *naga* again, which she considered an auspicious and significant sign, so she continued to visit and pray at the site, hearing the voice of Amman. From the time of her dream onwards she would regularly fall into trance states and receive communications from the 'nagapoosaniamman' goddess who spoke through her, making accurate pronouncements about not only the past, but also providing advice concerning current and future problems, in exchange for devotional acts. Others in the village learnt of her special gifts of prediction and insight and following the erection of a shrine, the site gradually increased in both size and importance in the region. The temple site gained a reputation as possessing great *sakti* (power), so much so that another local healer claimed the location was "too strong" for him and that only the oracle could harness or control its energy. Her reputation increased throughout the war years, as she continued to provide relief and solace for the few who stayed or those who returned to see her from other parts of the peninsula and abroad. I met her after several failed attempts, and she told me she had known of my previous visit and furthermore knew that I been to see another healer and then had gone on to make some other social visits.

Shanthi was in her forties, of sturdy build, dressed in casual western-style clothes - a skirt and blouse, her hair was worn loose, uncombed and she had no *pottu* or other adornments of jewellery; unusual among Tamil women most of whom are dress in a *panjabi* or sari, wearing gold at the neck and wrists, with hair plaited and oiled. She made little eye contact, answered all questions succinctly, but also warily: she spoke of the current violence among the young Tamil diaspora in Canada, but when I asked about the life of Tamils in the UK, she became "shy" and could not answer. Rather she emphatically insisted that I "*must come*" to the temple on one of the days when the deity 'speaks', as she was only the vehicle and I would understand better if I heard directly what Amman had to say, rather than talk to her, the oracle. There was something slightly intimidating about her and I was curious to understand more of what she implied.



Photo 5. A village *Naga* (snake) shrine

The oracles Lawrence (2000) describes from the east perform a similar service to the people of their communities; the only difference being that their pronouncements are made in the presence of other devotees and there appears to be a clearer sense of sharing and openness among the temple population. In contrast to all the northern oracles that I visited none shared their pronouncements openly and in many instances people attend alone and have private ‘consultations’ with the oracle. The following is a description of the healing event that I subsequently attended at Shanthi’s temple.

I attended this healing session at the Nagapoosaniamman kovil on a Tuesday – an auspicious day in the Hindu week. The temple is situated away from the coastal region in an area of fairly dense forestation, off a small lane in a village where the houses are mostly hidden from the street behind high palmyra fences: there are no sign-posts pointing to any of the temples, but they can clearly be seen by their high red and white striped walls (as with all Hindu temples). There are no road names and usually houses or people are found by asking around; this can alert the local inhabitants to strangers in the area. It took some time to locate the temple, which was largely hidden behind high fencing, but on walking through the tall gate and removing my sandals, I saw the temple gopuram looming upwards in the centre of the sandy, open temple space. It is covered by woven palmyra leaves that hides the wooden scaffolding that protects the builders from the fearsome heat and torrential monsoon rains and which also conceals the newly painted, colourful plaster figures of gods and demons that swarm over the tower and are temporarily concealed from view. The structure follows traditional temple architecture and lay-out: there is the large gopuram (tower) currently under renovation, and a large maha mandapam (central great hall) that is open sided with pillars supporting an arched roof, letting in the cooling breezes. There are colourfully painted images on pillars and ceiling depicting scenes from the life of Amman and representations of the naga. There is a wedding hall along the eastern perimeter and a new school building situated on the

western side and opposite; a large, recently built kulam (temple tank) with steps reaching down to the green-brown water at the bottom. The temple is non-Agamic and therefore there are no regular, timetabled puja, so it took some hours of waiting for the auspicious moment for the ceremony to arrive.

Shanthi arrived dressed in a sari and with her hair tied back, having changed into more traditional Tamil female clothes. She performed a puja in front of a small, mixed gathering of approximately twenty people and there followed an oration by a well known local speaker on Hindu philosophy. The handful of devotees were then joined by a growing number of people as the time approached for the main healing ritual to commence at about 11.00a.m; the numbers swelled to approximately sixty people; fairly equally mixed between males and females of different ages. Everyone moved to the area at the back of the great hall on the eastern side, and sat before a small stage, brightly decorated with paintings and statues of the Amman deity, nagas and other significant figures in Hindu mythology. On the stage, Shanthi stood with two male attendants and slowly tossed flowers over the statues from a huge woven basket handed to her by a temple assistant, and this was accompanied by drumming and a drone that continued throughout the ceremony, as she swayed gently from side to side. She continued to do this for another half an hour, until the deities were completely submersed in a thick carpet of flowers. She, in the mean time continued swaying from side to side, gradually falling into a trance; her eyes unfocussed and flickering back in her head, her swaying movements becoming more extreme. The temple attendants then instructed us to form a line in front of the stage (although most people clearly seemed to know what to expect, forming themselves into an orderly line) and each person, one after the other, climbed onto the stage to hear the message from the deity.

It appeared that no-one made any requests, nothing could be heard beyond the immediate aural space which was occupied by Shanthi, the

devotee and the temple attendants, but even the temple attendants on the stage were out of earshot when Shanthi in a deep trance, made her whispered pronouncements. Her approach with each person was essentially the same: I approached the cramped, small stage already filled with incense smoke, and flower petals and I was immediately oblivious to the other people looking on and was unable to see anyone other than Shanthi and one of the attendants. She held my head with both hands in a firm grasp and moved it around vigorously in circles and from side to side for a minute or so, she continued to sway her eyes either closed or half shut, muttering quietly and indistinguishably. She took handfuls of ash from a bucket, handed to her by one of the assistants and began to smear my face and head with great quantities, stuffing more in my hand, in a pot of water and even putting a small amount into my mouth. She did this repeatedly until I was covered with ash. She then took a thick bush of margosa (to protect against evil) in which was concealed a fairly hefty branch and proceeded to hit my head quite hard several times, interspersed with continuing to firmly massage my temples and head; inducing a mildly disorientating and hypnotic feeling, but at the same time I could feel a sense of mild anxiety about the potential damage to my skull! She appeared to be concentrating deeply, muttering to herself or in private correspondence and her voice had taken on a different, rasping tone. After some minutes she muttered in my ear, pronouncements that related to past disappointments, current good health and suggestions for future action - relaying a message that I 'have Amman with' me and I should continue to pray to her and then I would have a good and successful life, but that I should not undertake research on Amman!

I had prepared some questions, but they were not possible: there was no requirement to talk, ask or divulge personal information and there was no threat of something too private or risky being revealed as her muttering was done out of earshot of the others around us – even the temple assistants who were on the stage with us could not have heard, and she

states she is unable to recall what transpires. I was struck by how important this must be for someone who does not want to reveal some personal, private and possibly sensitive information publicly; even afterwards everyone quickly left the temple, each brushing holy ash from their clothes and hair, but there was no sense of socialising after the ceremony. So even though she was an 'oracle' there was very little open prediction in this healing ritual.

In each subsequent ceremony I attended, with a variety of different healers, practicing different healing methods from astrology to palm reading to *vaakku cholluthal*, this was one common aspect; the complete privacy of each healing event. I had not expected this as most rituals are fairly public and open – it was in fact more like western 'healing' where the doctor sees his patient alone in his consulting room, except of course that written records are kept and later each patient's case is discussed among a team of other health professionals, usually with the knowledge of the patient. Many Tamil healers use plants and herbs in their healing and both Ayurvedic and Siddha Medicine are widely practiced and accepted among the populace. Emphasis in both is with the physical agents of recovery and treatment, which pose little threat in terms of revealing problems and emotions: there is again, no requirement for revelation or exposure.

Thuukkukkaavadi: the transformation of a ritual

In the distance loud devotional music can be heard directing one's attention towards a small group of men and women dressed in their finest clothes, walking through the narrow streets and lanes. In their midst is a small tractor onto which an elaborate piece of scaffolding has been erected; the upper section of wood is positioned horizontally and suspended from it hangs a man – the *thuukkukkaavadibakktharan*, attached by ropes to large hooks piercing the flesh of his back and legs. A silver *vel* (spear) is passed through his cheeks and mouth to give protection; it extrudes from either side of his mouth and has a cobra-shaped head fitted in the center (see photo 6, p. 202). In one hand he clasps a sprig of margosa leaves and in the other a silver *vel*; he waves both arms up and down

slowly through the humid air like a giant bird flapping its wings. Sitting atop the scaffolding another man has the strenuous task of bouncing the entire scaffold with his weight, adding to the sense of flight. Loud devotional music plays from speakers; garlands of flowers are draped over the scaffold and a large wooden panel, brightly painted with colourful images of various Hindu deities forms a backdrop with huge bunches of plantains still on their stems, tied to each side of the vehicle.

The ritual of *thuukkukkaavadi* is linked traditionally with propitiations to a popular Hindu deity - Lord Murugan, but has more recently widened to include devotees of other deities including numerous Amman (Mother) goddesses. Its increasing prevalence dates from the latter part of the war; the period of government army occupation of the northern peninsula in the mid 1990s to the present day and of course, includes the devastation of the tsunami. Prior to the war, *thuukkukkaavadi* was performed among a narrowly defined segment of Tamil society: criminals in prison under threat of execution by hanging made vows to Lord Murugan – known for his generosity in granting boons, requesting that if released they would pierce themselves in penance for their misdeeds. One of the organisers of the *kaavadi* ritual also proposed that fishermen initiated the ritual as an act of penance for the fish they killed, by inserting small fishing hooks through their skin. Its reputation therefore located the practice within a narrowly confined social and environmental setting, and as a form of penance undertaken by those who had committed wrongful or harmful acts. Consequently it was a relatively rare practice that was seldom observed; but when it was, would bring people onto the streets to watch. Over the period of the war however, the ritual has transformed and become a common, familiar sight throughout the peninsula during the festival period; it has also continued into the cease-fire, post-tsunami era. It transcends boundaries of caste, class and social milieu, and finds its devotees amongst students, labourers, office workers and professionals alike. Many profess little ‘religious’ motivation, but cite personal challenge, testing their tolerance for pain and even, ‘fun’ – *musuppathi*, and as a way to attract girls. But before analysing the circumstances of its transformation, it is necessary to identify its legendary origins and variety as a way of understanding why it might have risen to such prominence at this juncture in Sri Lankan Tamil social and political reality.

According to Hindu myth, Lord Murugan^{lxiv}, son of Siva and Parvati is described by Fuller Collins (1997) as both a “god-king, ruler of a divinely ordered society” and a youthful challenger and teacher to the older gods, who in some respects appears to undermine their authority. His name is derived from notions of youthfulness, splendour and compassion; he is often invoked as the “divine lover” (p.19), and from the seventh century onwards as the war God, Skanda. As Skanda he battles and overwhelms the demon brothers Taaraka, Sinkamukan and Surapadma (or Suran) in the *Skanda Sasti* ceremony, which is symbolically re-enacted at the large Murugan temple in Jaffna each October/November. The higher Gods were unable to defeat these demons, but Murugan having been born with six faces and arms (thus known as Arumugam: ‘six faces’) was seen as a strong and able fighter. In a fierce battle Murugan charges the brothers in turn and using his *vel* (an instrument of victory), manages to defeat them, despite Surapadma’s many disguises. Unable to fool Murugan, Surapadma is eventually overwhelmed when his own weapons are turned against him: the cockerel and peacock, which then become Murugan’s pennant and vehicle respectively. This is to demonstrate the power of knowledge over ignorance, and rather than seeking to destroy evil, it is converted into good. Amongst his Tamil devotees Murugan is also known as both a protector and a healer of sickness: worship of him is thought to confer “worldly security and prosperity” and help resolve difficulties in material, everyday life. There are many devotional songs to the youthful divine figure of Murugan and this emphasis on youthfulness is widely envisaged among Jaffna devotees. These qualities of youthfulness, protection and healing are forceful incentives in the lives of younger Tamils.

In the legend of its origins, *kaavadi*^{lxv} refers to the heavy wooden arched frame decorated with peacock feathers on either side, which is carried on the shoulders of Murugan devotees during temple festivals and celebrations. It is a symbolic representation of the two hills brought from Mount Kailash by Lord Agasthya’s servant, the demon Idumban. The story relates how Idumban dropped the hills in the south Indian region of Palani in order to rest, before progressing on his journey further south. On waking, he found he was unable to lift the hills and continue his journey, as sitting on the top of one was a handsome youth who claimed the hills as his; Idumban in defiance fought the youth, but was killed. The youth, who was Murugan, was requested by Siva to resurrect this

favoured servant of Agashtya, which he did; Idumban thereafter became Murugan's guardian of the hills and its temple at Palani in Tamil Nadu. The site continues to see many devotees every year carrying the *kaavadi* on their shoulders in devotion to the deity, up the steep steps to the top of the hill where the temple is situated. This also ensured Murugan's place as a favoured God of the Tamils and there are six holy temples dedicated to him throughout Tamil Nadu, as well as three located on the Jaffna peninsula and several further Murugan temples that lead the pilgrim eventually to Kathirkamam in the south east.

Within the tradition of *kaavadi* there are many forms such as dancing, hanging and carrying *kaavadi* that have their specific descriptive prefixes: *aathumkaavadi* for example, is the name given to a form whereby males of varying ages – including small children, dance whilst carrying the *kaavadi*, usually in a group accompanied by a troupe of drummers, *nadeswaran* (pipe) players and a supportive group of family/village members. Many of the adult *aathumkaavadi* devotees also have 108/1008 (the sacred number of steps in Lord Nataraja's dance) small hooks placed in their backs and/or arms (see photo 6, p.202). *Paalkaavadi* refers to the pot of milk carried on the head of female devotees to the temple, often a journey of many kilometres and undertaken either alone or in small groups of women, or with the *aathumkaavadi* devotees.



Photo 6. 108 *velkal*

Most devotees of whatever form – including some young children and women – have small hooks inserted in their arms, and a *vel* through their cheeks. Some have thin strings attached in decorative patterns over their backs and others have only two larger hooks from which they are then lead in the dance by a companion (see photo 1, p.2). *Theerkaavadi* denotes a devotee whose string/rope attachments are connected to a small cart or *theer* instead of companion, which he pulls from temple to temple.

In Sri Lanka a unique form of *kaavadi* was introduced in the 1960s in which a wooden scaffold was erected on a tractor and ropes attached from which the devotee is suspended in a variety of forms. The word *thuukku* (also meaning to lift or raise, or hang as a form of execution) or *paravaikkaavadi* are the generic names given to all the suspended forms of *kaavadi* in Jaffna^{lxvi}, but it should be noted that within this, different styles exist.



Photo 7. *Thullakkaavadi*

Some hang horizontally as though flying through the air suspended on eight hooks in the back and legs, known as *paravaikkaavadi* (bird *kaavadi*). Some are hung by one or two hooks from the top of their back, referred to as *thullakkaavadi* (see photo 7, above). There is also *sappanankkaavadi* (sitting cross-legged) also with eight hooks, and *ungelkaavadi* whereby a small child sits in an *ungel* (swing) attached to ropes hanging on either side of the father who is suspended in *paravaikkaavadi* mode. Some groups perform *thuukkukkaavadi* together; for example two devotees will perform *paravaikkaavadi* and inbetween them, a third will perform *sappanankkaavadi*, all suspended from the same tractor (see photo 2, p.15). This is for a variety of reasons some of which I was told related to the vow, the cost, aesthetics and/or comradeship: for example I met brothers, fellow villagers and university friends, who undertook the ritual together.

These devotees are then transported on a journey from temple to temple. The temple of origin may have a different deity to that at the journey's end; for example the local village temple maybe an Amman (Mother) temple - Kalliamman, Mariamman,

Pidariamman or Veeramaikaliyamman, whereas the destination may be a Murugan temple; thereby devotion is twofold. Each temple that is passed en route, the entourage stops at its nearest junction or crossroads and veneration of the deities within is made by the breaking of a coconut and further cries of “*arohara*” by the entourage. At the destination, the devotee receives *darshan* from the deity and is then carefully lowered to the ground. Following a final circumambulation of the temple, a special *mantra* is given by the priest and a large feast is then held for the entire village, which completes the ritual.

Among the ancient *Veddas* of Sri Lanka who were the original inhabitants of the island, the *vel* (spear or lance) also associated with Lord Murugan has a dominant place in worship: it protects against bad spirits, is used in a dance to bring good fortune before hunting and, if the *vel* is placed in the ground it ensures the safety of any children left unattended nearby. The Veddas were known as *iya vamsa* – ‘sons of arrows’ and it is believed that Murugan was originally a tribal hunter god who became the national god of the Tamils because of the protective features of the *vel*. The *vel* is the *mulamurthi* (the anthropomorphic representation of the deity) in many Murugan temples in the north and east of Sri Lanka, known as *velayuta* shrines/temples. An essential aspect of *kaavadi* is the *vel* inserted through the cheeks and mouth; it is both a symbol of Murugan and *vel* worship; by renouncing speech it promotes concentration towards higher thoughts of the deity (referred to in Tamil as *mauna*), which also ensures his protection of the supplicant (see photo 6; p. 202). How the gods come to be understood, changes according to the setting in which their devotees are living and worshipping according to Krishnapillai (2003:16), who writes: “....the way in which the people apprehend the divine is a statement about the way in which they see themselves and their content in a given moment”. This contributes to an understanding of how *vel* worship and *thuukkukkaavadi* have developed and changed within the current state of violence, self-censure and suspicion. I would suggest it can be seen as a representation of silence not only for greater devotion, but also within the present context of oppression; there are many who admit they undertake this not as a religious vow, but use words such as *chavaal*: ‘challenge’.

This ritual seems to convey in symbolic and mimetic form personal experiences that are related to various aspects that include devotion, as well as more recent concerns that are

difficult to articulate for a multiplicity of reasons. It was noticeable how quiet people were generally on issues concerning the realities of the aftermath of war that lay beyond their immediate practical and material concerns. I felt that some of these concerns were being symbolically mirrored in this particular ritual: the 'mouth lock' - discovered by archaeologists from an earlier ritual in Tamil Nadu (Wood, 2002), or silver *vel* pierced through the cheeks rendering the devotee silent.

So, what of the many devotees now undertaking the ritual *not* as part of a vow? It seemed to represent the challenges posed for many people in the community today - not only those performing the ritual - in fact it was made clear to me during one particular interview that I should not view *thuukkukkaavadi* as an individual act, but rather one carried out on behalf of the entire village/community. A spontaneous and recurrent theme in conversations with both practitioners and interested parties concerning *thuukkukkaavadi*, was the number of devotees who had been imprisoned and were now fulfilling vows made whilst incarcerated, or who were returning from abroad to fulfil vows made prior to their escape some years previously. I spoke to one woman who stated she thought it released the individual from the burden of their memories of torture. I never heard it mentioned self-referentially; it was always reported about someone else, usually a friend or acquaintance. The *thuukkukkaavadi* organiser, who had originated the current form described above in the 1960's, noted that the devotees had changed. He identified the change as occurring during the mid 1990s when the SLA took control of the northern peninsula and the fighting was at its height: a mass exodus of the civilian population had taken place, multi-barrel rocket launchers were introduced for the first time and civilian casualties were high. Of further relevance was the extensive number of Tamils arrested and imprisoned under the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), part of the large-scale cordon-and-search operations carried out by the security forces. Arrests were made on suspicion of collaboration or membership of the LTTE and many Tamils were illegally detained without trial, sometimes for many years, and tortured; there were also extra-judicial killings and disappearances (Refugee Council 2001). It is these circumstances that are relevant and significant – the background of war and currently, the absence of war but also absence of peace creating an ongoing sense of unease and threat.

There are few social analyses of the *kaavadi* ritual as practiced elsewhere among Tamil communities, although examples from Malaysia offer three worth mentioning here. Willford (2000) in his social analysis of a Tamil community in Malaysia, proposes that there are more subtle ways of representing ambivalences towards hierarchies than through millenarian cults and rituals of reversal, as suggested in Scott's notion of "hidden transcripts". He suggests that Scott does not provide a sufficiently complete analysis of the "complex production of self and community" (p. 2). In order to give a fuller account of idioms of ethnicity and their affiliation to nationalist ideologies, Willford describes a Malaysian Hindu Tamil festival that encapsulates the ambivalence of Tamils both towards their own community and the broader span of society. This festival highlights these social complexities and their oppressive hierarchies of class and caste still existing both within Hindu Tamil society and the larger, multi-ethnic community. This ambiguity demonstrates the necessity of examining issues of ethnicity and nationalism through careful studies of self and community and the production of power. The Hindu Tamil festival of Thai Poosam, enables Tamils who represent much of the Malaysian underclass, to express their ambivalence towards social hierarchies that are at once oppressive and internally as well as externally configured. Fuller Collins (1997) confirms the status of *kaavadi* as a ritual performed by the lower caste communities in Malaysia. Here there is an element of stigmatisation towards the *kaavadi* practitioners, whereby Hindu reformists are keen to distance and dissociate 'true' Hindu religious practice from these so called arcane and populist practices. These elite Indians state that the practice of such populist religious practices serves to strengthen degrading images of the Hindu Tamils within the larger Malaysian community of mainly Islamic followers. Again Ward (1980) emphasises the low caste, class devotees but concentrates more on the bio-psychological aspects related to pain and motivation. She also suggests that vanity plays a part in its increasing popularity in Malaysia evidenced by the ever more elaborate styles seen among these young devotees. She also acknowledges the importance of *kaavadi* not only for individual devotees, but also their own communities that offers some element of catharsis in resolving conflicts. However, neither Willfords', Wards' nor Fuller Collins' assertions apply in Sri Lanka in terms of demographics; all the devotees I spoke to came from a broad spectrum of both caste and social class groupings to include school and

university students, professionals, agricultural and office workers and now, many Tamils returning from abroad who are also undertaking the vow.

The organiser has been requested to provide materials and advice to Tamils living in the UK who wish to undertake a *thuukkukkaavadi* ritual. There is no distinction of caste, class or professional background, which makes the undertaking of these vows especially noteworthy in terms of changes to cultural practice as a consequence of the war – conversely what is perhaps most interesting, is that they *do* come from all cross-sections of society and therefore there is some element of unificatory ritualisation. Ultimately, the war was indiscriminate – especially among those who remained, so it can be surmised that anyone would and could carry out such a vow – although in Jaffna *thuukku-* and *aathumkaavadi* are undertaken by men only, it must be remembered that it is often on behalf of the family or village. Women engage in acts of body piercing with insertions of the *vel* through their cheeks and arms, they also are more likely to become entranced or possessed, as described later. It may be asked why I have chosen to focuss on male rituals rather than those of the women; this is due to the transformative aspects found in *thuukkukkaavadi*, which are not present in the rituals carried out by women, there has been no exponential increase or notable changes in their spiritual practices. In the temples women form the majority of worshippers, whereas the exception lies in the devotional practice of *kaavadi* where the men, uniquely take a more dominant role at the time of the temple festival. At this period of heightened meaning and exposure the males become more actively involved; at other times it is said that worship is the domain of the elderly and women. It has been reported that in other parts of the country, women have also undertaken *kaavadi* (Obeyesekere 1978) – in particular *aathumkaavadi*. Although I did not observe this in Jaffna, I was told anecdotally that in some rare instances it does happen amongst younger girls, and that they are more likely to be entranced.

The influence of Arumugar Navalar, who fought against the more folkish elements of Hindu practice, whilst an important Hindu theologian and reformer, failed to halt the ‘low rituals’ associated with *kaavadi*. When confronted by the realities of oppression, fear and desperation, recourse to non-Agamic direct deity worship has burgeoned. Painful, unanswered questions related to the causes of the current violence have not been forthcoming for many devotees of Brahmanised worship, and they have turned towards a

more direct and personal communion with the deity. Therefore, despite some significant parallels between Malaysian and Sri Lankan social, ethnic and political developments over the last few decades: ethnic quota systems are in place in both countries that disfavour the Tamils in terms of education and jobs for example, there is a greater heterogeneity among the Sri Lankan devotees of *kaavadi*. I would surmise that this relates specifically to the Tamil experience of conflict in Sri Lanka.

Among these devotees there is a new-found egalitarianism within the practice of *kaavadi* that defies not only the divisiveness of political governance, but also the older 'high' Tamil Hindu values from the past. The educated Tamil elite would have previously sought to distance themselves from their working-class, low caste ethnic counterparts, and at the same time distance themselves from the non-Agamic, folk rituals prevalent among lower-caste Tamils. Attempts were made at religious reform to counteract what they perceived to be "lower" forms of Hindu religious practice, which was to some degree successful – at least temporarily. Now however, with the exodus of so many of the elite, higher-caste Tamils from the north to foreign countries, as well as the pressures of living in constant fear of violence, there has been a levelling out and a redefining of social barriers and status rules. This has had an equalising effect in terms of not only suffering but also in methods of addressing these concerns; evidenced by the vast numbers of *kaavadi* devotees who pour into the main temple of Lord Murugan during the festival period.

The festival offers both a forum and an opportunity to be seen: there are up to a million festival attendants over the course of the twenty-five day festival, to say nothing of the other temples where there are also hundreds of *kaavadi* devotees.

Fuller-Collins takes a predominantly psychoanalytic interpretation of the ritual of *kaavadi*, for example suggesting that the elephant's trunk of Pillaiyar (Ganesh) is a phallic symbol, and the tongue piercing a symbol of impotence. I would suggest that it is the silencing aspect of the tongue piercing that has more symbolic significance than those related to the western psychoanalytic theories of Freud. This silence is not only to enable the devotee to concentrate on higher things however, but is also the renunciation of language and speech that I would presume has greater political resonance for the silenced *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees.

Obeyesekere (1978) noted the transformation of Buddhist religiosity at the holy site of Kataragama (or Kathiragamam) in the south-east of Sri Lanka, as early as the 1970s. He observed many Buddhist Sinhalese devotees who had turned towards bhakti devotionalism and the Hindu god Skanda-Murugan^{lxvii}, known as able to grant boons and bestow protection towards his devotees. One of the first Sinhalese Buddhists to perform the fire-walking ceremony, previously a renowned Hindu folk ritual from southern India, was a man who had fought in the Second World War. During an intense bombing raid at Monte Casino in Italy, he made a vow to Skanda the war god that if he survived he would do fire-walking at Kataragama. This is one example of how intense and life-threatening experiences may lead to extreme forms of religious dedication, but other significant factors identified by Obeyesekere relate to social change.

Rising population figures, high unemployment and the consequent urbanisation of many rural Sinhalese, who were forced to leave families and villages in search of work resulted in social upheavals and adherence to divine, rather than demonic forms of possession. His identification of the wild dancing of *aathumkaavadi* that expresses he suggests, the repressed sexual desires of unmarried males does have relevance for the Jaffa Tamils, particularly with respect to changing marriage prospects post-war, but I would say this is not a sufficient explanation – certainly when applied in the context of Jaffna social and political experience over the last two decades. It is easy to see Freudian concepts of the unconscious mind at work amongst these devotees, but that alone does not account for the dramatic increase in practitioners from the period following occupation by the government army of the peninsula – and in particular, the specific form of hanging *kaavadi*.

The *kaavadikkara inthu* (organiser) is a deeply devout Hindu, a follower of Ayyapan (a popular south Indian God from Subramalai) and the originator of *thuukkukkaavadi* in its present style and formation in Jaffna. He was cheerfully willing to talk about his ideas concerning the origins of *thuukkukkaavadi*, whilst also allowing me access to his work to obtain a more enhanced understanding of the ritual and his role. This in turn brought me into contact with many devotees. He found some of my early, naive questions amusing: such as ‘did devotees talk to him about their reasons for doing the ritual?’ or ‘did they confide in him about problems?’ He responded, shaking his head and chuckling: “no,

never". Moving on from this line of thinking, I began to reach a clearer understanding and confirmation of the inapplicability of western modes of psychological reasoning or theorising that are then transposed to a setting and context that engages with other notions and worlds entirely. It could be argued that I have in fact taken a psychological approach by analysing the role of *kaavadi* in relation to the war and expressions of suffering. I would advocate that thinking ontologically about questions such as 'why has this happened to me?' or 'what has caused my current state of suffering?' is universal, but could also be defined as 'psychologising'. It is how these universal questions are construed and responded to that I was interested in understanding: how they are framed and informed by notions that recognise and utilise specific bodies of knowledge and understanding, for example, of a cosmological world. A cosmos of deities rather than therapists it could be said – and utilised to equally good effect.

As stated, interviews generally revealed little useful data and were often greeted with perplexity and some anxiety; they were therefore not conducive to gaining either trust or building a clear picture of behaviour. There was noticeably more to be experienced and therefore gained, through participation in the performative aspects of the rituals. People's actions and reactions concerning the diverse and multi-dimensional events taking place within these settings provided a much greater sense of reality. There were smaller dramas taking place offstage and away from the larger performance itself that could only be noted, and then comprehended within context. For example, women were usually situated at the edges of these performances and would have been largely unrecognised through the formal interview format and process, but by initially identifying these women at the scene and then engaging in conversation with them on the journey from temple to temple, I was able to grasp something of their role that had hitherto gone unnoticed by me in the midst of the larger and more visible drama of the *kaavadi* performance itself. The males at these occasions remained mostly passive; as is the case at funerals it was the women who seemed to be openly articulating the collective distress through their tears, possession trances and generally a greater willingness to share their stories and those of their brothers, fathers and other male relatives: not always the causes leading to the vow itself, which remained largely unspoken, but the life events. I was naturally much more readily sought out by groups of women at these rituals and on the journeys from temple to

temple, some of which would take several hours, so it was in these circumstances that I was able to learn from them and develop a broader perspective.

In many settings, notions of confidence and trust arise from the sharing of intimate knowledge and personal information, especially with regard to experiences of suffering and distress, emphasis is placed on revealing and ‘opening up’ the self. However in this setting, personal information can be contentious and the less that is known the better, reducing the possibility of betrayal, judgment or abuse – only torturers ask endless questions and seek intimate knowledge. The implications of this for researchers are immense and require careful consideration of the methods used in any desire to obtain knowledge and understanding. Living without knowing is something that many in the north have come to understand and actively seek, and to some extent this is necessitated among researchers and curious visitors too. So, information obtained through analysing discursive speech acts concerning devotees ‘motivations’ were inapplicable in this setting and instead, insight was better achieved by being more closely attuned to local action and circumstance. Ultimately participation in these performance rituals helped me grasp and comprehend some of the complex ontological questions.

‘Lord of the clouds’: the organiser

In 1960, aged eleven, Kanthan was taken to see a doctor because of frequent fitting. They could not treat him and his parents were warned that he would eventually probably die: “they gave up on me”. Kanthan however, made a vow and decided to walk to Kathirkamam in the south – a site of ancient holy temples for Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. He undertook the ‘fire-walk’: walking on burning coals in fulfilment of his vow for which he continued these pilgrimages over a period of three years, until his fits stopped. This established a personal perspective in which he recognised the importance of regular devotion to the deities. Thereafter, he decided to dedicate his life to the realisation of this, and eventually came to assist others in the fulfillment of their vows.

In 1968 he decided for the first time to take *kaavadi* following a conversation with a relative who had been to India and witnessed the ritual, which was made in honour and

devotion to Lord Murugan. In India *aathumkaavadi* (dancing *kaavadi*) and *theerkaavadi* are popular; the latter whereby the devotee drags a small replica of the temple chariot (*theer*) attached to hooks in his back, and a spear *vel* through his cheeks and tongue. Kanthan was also familiar with stories from the fishermen of Jaffna who pierced the skin on their arms with small fishing hooks as an act of penance for hooking and killing fish (see photo 8, p.213). He also knew of the criminals who performed *kaavadi* following their release from prison and the threat of the gallows; again as an act of penance and thanks to Lord Murugan.

Kanthan and his relative devised the notion of a 'hanging' *kaavadi*, in recognition of Lord Murugan's *vahana* – vehicle, the peacock (*mayil*), which became known as *paravaikkaavadi* (bird *kaaavdi*) and is unique to the north. Using wooden scaffolding and ropes, they created through trial and error a way of devising a method to realise their intention. This was for him a serious and thoughtful symbolic recreation and incorporation of the sacred objects associated with the much beloved Lord Murugan. The *kaavadi* itself is a representation of the holy Mount Kailash in the Himalayas; the margosa leaves that each devotee carries are said to have healing properties; the protective *vel* or lance of Lord Murugan: one piercing the mouth and the other held in the hand, all now form an integral part to the ritual.

Kanthan has performed all forms of *kaavadi* himself on at least twelve occasions in various settings: he has been suspended for eighteen hours journeying to a festival in Colombo, another journey was made of twenty-eight kilometres; he has visited India and Malaysia. During the IPKF time he was exiled in Malaysia and undertook his vows for five consecutive years in the hope of releasing his country from the grip of war and occupation. It was on one of these occasions that he placed a ten foot long metal pole, a quarter inch thick through his cheeks that supported a structure of twenty-one *sinnakkaavadikal* ('little *kaavadi*'s'). He has trained a handful of others in the methods of *thuukkukkaavadi* and some have copied his techniques; few have attained his reknown for safety, devoutness and skill however.

At the outset there were a handful of devotees performing *kaavadi* on the northern peninsula; most of whom were undertaking vows either made in prison, or as fulfilment of a vow following recovery from ill health, or childlessness. In the mid-nineteen

nineties, he noticed a dramatic increase in the numbers of younger aged devotees requesting his help in undertaking the *thuukkukkaavadi* ritual. Unprompted, he attributed this to their experiences of imprisonment and torture, when he felt these younger Tamils would have made their vows to be released from captivity and immense suffering. The reasons for the vow remain unarticulated within the tradition of the ritual, but he was able to surmise the reasons as a response to a “critical life or death” situation (this ‘critical life or death’ aspect arose from other interviewees time and again).

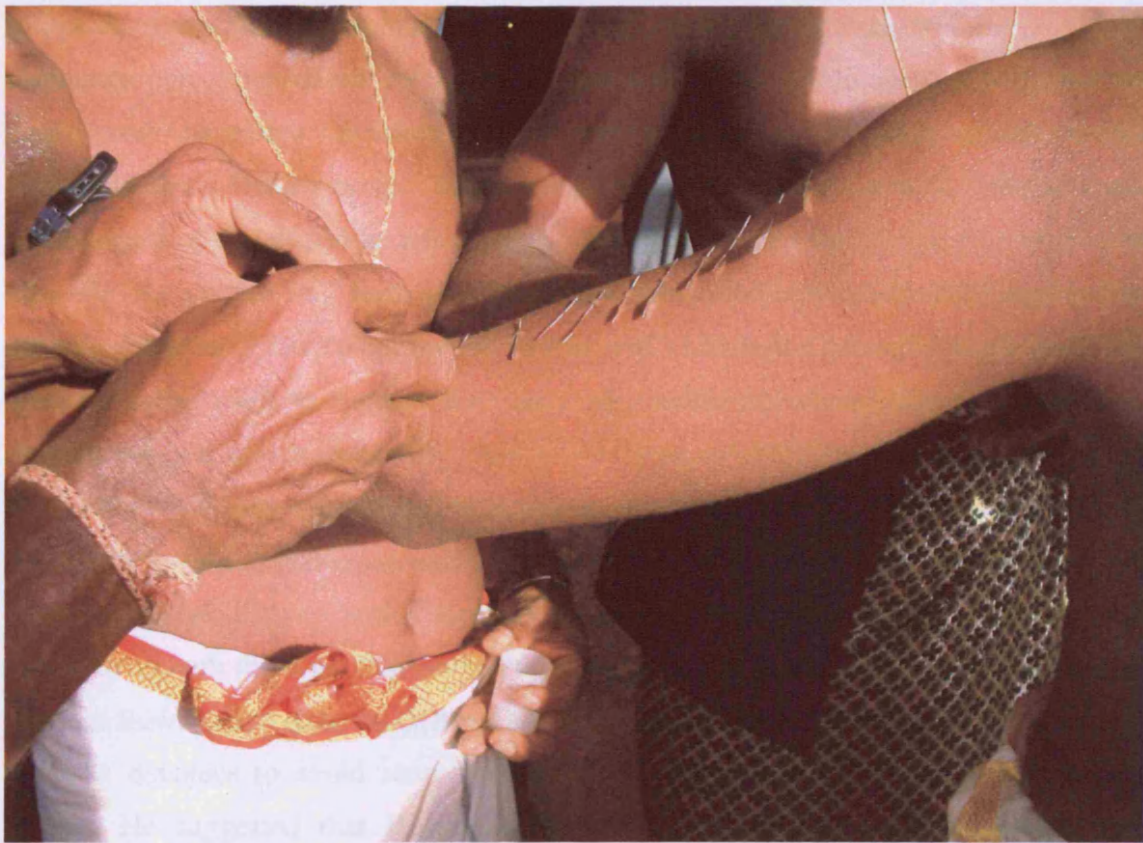


Photo 8. Arm *velkal*

Numbers have risen from a handful in an entire year, to hundreds: I personally witnessed in one day at the *theetham* (water cutting) ceremony approximately seventy and nearly as many the day before at the *Theer* festival (chariot) of the main Kanthaswamy/Murugan temple festival. This has been a fairly consistent number over the last ten years. Other major Murugan temples, of which there are approximately three on the peninsula, as well

as the many smaller Amman or Pillaiyar temples, all have their own festivals throughout the year with *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees taking part, which demonstrates the magnitude of the increase.

Kanthan is trusted implicitly for his experience, discretion and professionalism. His understanding of the ritual places divine authority with the deity, who controls pain, stops bleeding and ultimately protects and confers a sense of peace and calmness onto the devotee who possesses a true grasp of this divine force. He confirms this by the example of his own experience; he asked me how he, as a diabetic who easily suffered infections following even a small scratch, had never had any ill-effects following peircing.

Kanthan's perception of his role is largely pragmatic; he sees himself as performing a useful and necessary function for the community by assisting them in the accomplishment of their vows. He does not have a title as such; people find out about him by word of mouth and he relies on his reputation and that of his sons who also assist him. He hopes one day they will take over this important devotional duty, but is concerned that they have other ambitions that will result in the cessation of his work. He also needs the work to finance his yearly pilgrimages to worship Lord Ayyappan in Subramalai, in southern India.

In terms of recovery, Kanthan states that a vegetarian diet is important and ensures healing following *thuukkukkaavadi*: he recommends eleven days without fish, meat, and eggs. Sexual abstinence and abstention from alcohol are also important during this period. Although there is often no bleeding at the insertion of the hooks, he encourages blood to flow at their removal. When I asked why this was he stated that it was cleansing, but tells devotees to avoid soap; hot water and *vibuthi* (holy ash) are recommended instead. He suggested that fatter people bled more easily than thinner people and confirmed that some people do faint because of the pain; he always continues but is alert to their condition – no-one has ever asked him to stop. He is self-taught and has learnt by trial and error how to balance the ropes, build the scaffolding safely, what type of wood is best, and the positioning of the hooks - which I was told by several devotees related to acupuncture points. The bouncing of the scaffold from above helps ease pressure on the muscles he says, and prevents them from going into spasm, which in turn makes them harder to remove. It also recreates the flying bird motif. He is aware of some more

inexperienced and unscrupulous practitioners who have had accidents: the wood breaking, the devotee unbalanced and hitting the ground or the vehicle behind for example.

Kanthan charges enough to cover his costs, plus some extra that contributes towards his yearly pilgrimage. He provides both the sacred objects: the *kaavadi*, *vel*, limes to ward off evil, camphor, *puu maalai* (flower garland), plantains, holy ash, margosa leaves, hooks and rope, and the paraphernalia: tractor, scaffolding and sound system. The music forms an important element for most devotees, helping to focus their minds to enter a higher state of consciousness, empowerment and ecstasy. A few selected pieces of well-known devotional music with these qualities are chosen to accompany the devotee on their journey. He reports seeing many more devotees coming from abroad, who he suspects have made vows related to their escape from Sri Lanka. Notably, he says that *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees come from all classes and castes; he himself is from the *Vellala* caste who are also known as “Lords of the Clouds” (Tambiah 2001: 92), because of their ability and skill in controlling and storing water for agricultural purposes. In Sri Lanka *thuukkukkaavadi* is performed exclusively by Hindus; although Kanthan related an unusual occasion when he helped two Catholic boys, who during a visit to an astrologer were told they were facing a ‘life threatening situation’ and were advised to make a vow to Lord Murugan and perform *thuukkukkaavadi* as a way of ensuring their protection.

Once the ceremony is finished, Kanthan and his sons leave very quickly and there is no further communication between him and the devotees, so he presumes all is well. It was noticeable that there was very little what might be termed ‘relationship’ established between himself, or his sons and the devotees; he often meets them for the first time at the ceremony itself. He does not know their names or any personal details and there is very little contact outside the ceremony itself; both parties remain separate within the temple space – the creation of a social atmosphere would be inappropriate, despite its informality. In this sense, he has limited information and therefore control, which is a significant aspect of the ritual related to its more recent transformation. In terms of how these new devotees approach the ritual, issues of control, respect and community versus violation and a lack of control and respect, are paramount. In *thuukkukkaavadi* there is no requirement to pass on information, personal details and there is little verbal contact

outside the practical arrangements, and no sense of intrusiveness into past or present circumstances – dissimilar to many other healing settings, let alone any experiences of imprisonment. There is instead high regard for safety, trust, and devotion within the ritual performance and practice as a whole. Unlike the secretive world of the prison, this is open and takes place in the full presence of the village and its members. It does not set out to destroy the body and language but conversely seeks to remake and restore through catharsis an empowerment of body, spirit and community. Paradoxically, it is the exposure of the body that protects rather than invites intrusion or invasion, contrasting strongly with the secretly insidious omnipresence of the interrogation room, where the spoken word becomes both a weapon, a betrayal and a symbol of disempowerment.

Kanthan neither identifies himself, nor is identified by others, as a healer. Rather, he acts as the conduit or messenger for a particular deity and is seen, and sees himself as providing a service for his community that is both practical and necessary in order for others to fulfil their vows. His reputation has been built over the years based on word of mouth as others have sought him out for advice and to carry out this difficult task. I would frequently ask devotees how they perceived his role; they unanimously stated that they placed all their trust and faith firstly in *swami* – God, to ensure that they remained safe and able to tolerate the pain and to protect them from harm in other areas of life. However, they trusted the organiser in the practicalities, based on his experience and reputation, but did not identify him as a spiritual link or guide.

Kaavadi devotees

I eventually met many people who had themselves performed the ceremony or knew someone else who had, and began to build up a picture of why this ritual had become so significant in its current manifestation. Conversations concerning the practice of *thuukkukkaavadi* became more meaningful when combined and contextualised with discussions, conversations and observations of its role in local expressions of suffering. I heard repeatedly how widespread it had become over the last seven or eight years – difficult years in terms of the war, and gained the impression that this related directly to

both community and personal experiences of conflict. There were some who regarded *thuukkukkaavadi* as an act of devotion and respect for Lord *Murugan*, whilst others considered it an act of bravery and heroism, yet others suggested it was also a good way to attract the girls – there was therefore some disparity in how it was perceived among the populace. An early conversation about *kaavadi* with a local NGO worker in Jaffna, introduced me to the idea that it seemed to have undergone a transformation. He described his own experience of *aathumkaavadi*, recently undertaken for the fifth time at his village festival. Within his village he was active in helping to maintain and uphold some of its social activities and assist in rebuilding the community after years of destruction and dispersement. He had been part of a group of fellow villagers responsible for initiating projects to build a community hall as well as the reinstigation of village celebrations around the temple. He undertook *aathumkaavadi* as part of this but also as a “personal challenge” and test of strength and tolerance for pain, not as a religious vow and it became clear that this was a frequently held view among practitioners: a combination of challenge, a testing of the self to determine strength and to instill self-respect. He later went on to perform *paravaikkaavadi* at a time when violence in Jaffna and his village was increasing rapidly - although he denies any connection between the two, claiming his motivation arose out of a long held desire to perform the ritual, he also stated it was an act of catharsis that dispelled momentarily his feelings of aggression.

In *aathumkaavadi*, the devotee carries the large wooden *kaavadi* frame and performs a dance usually within a troupe of between three and twenty or more others. It is performed with gradually increasing fervour and exhaustion along a journey from temple to temple. The dancers, aged from two years old up to men in their fifties, always perform the same dance steps although these vary regionally, as does the music. The music and drumming becomes increasingly frenzied, which usually leads the dancers into a trance state (see photo 9, p.218). Along the ensuing journey, the combination of exhaustion, dehydration and heat seems to contribute to their entranced state; devotees seem to drift in and out - this perhaps assists them in being able to continue under grueling conditions.



Photo 9. *Aathumkkaavadi*

Many women also perform their own strenuous vows, two of which are predominant: *pal* (milk) *kaavadi* and *kumbudupora* or *adialithal*. The first involves carrying a pot of milk set on a woven ring of palmyra leaves and covered with margosa leaves on the head often over many kilometres in the intense heat, or a pot with burning camphor. The second is performed both en route and around the inner temple precincts. The female devotee kneels with both feet behind, right foot crossed over left, and briefly touches her forehead to the ground, she then rises takes three steps forward and then kneels again. This is done repeatedly and often over long distances; there is a subtlety to it unlike the drama of *kaavadi*, that belies its strenuousness and I heard both women and men acknowledge the vow as arduous and difficult. Within the temple she is always given space and people wait patiently until she has passed. Mostly vows relate to the quest for marriage, health and children.

My next encounter was with a man who had performed *paravaikkaavadi* on two occasions. Sivam was thirty years old and was a doctor of complementary medicine who had an interest in acupuncture. He and his parents had lived abroad for twelve years and returned at the beginning of the cease-fire period. He was an example of the newer devotees in that although he performed *paravaikkaavadi* as an act of devotion, he was also interested in its connections with both acupuncture and an Indian form of secret martial art using pressure points in the body called *varmam*, said to be handed down by Rishi Agashtya and which has both the power to heal and kill. Although Sivam, without being asked, denied having any reasons for undertaking the ritual and claimed to have made no request to Lord Murugan, stating he was motivated out of an interest in research, this was contradicted by his later statements.

Sivam referred to its empowering qualities and the sense of elation it produced, which he stated was different to the serotonin high produced by physical exercise alone. He also emphasised the feeling of power it gave him, which he referred to as “warrior power” that could enable him to “beat a hundred people down” and even have “destructive purposes”. Later a sense of calmness and greater confidence, concentration and energy took over that lasted about twenty-four hours. He confirmed that although painful, it helped to have devotional music playing that could assist in reaching a state of trance, however, a different type of music would produce the opposite effect and be “all wrong”. He had some explanations that related to his knowledge of complementary medicine, such as referring to acupuncture points that he thought minimised pain when the hooks and mouth *vel* were inserted, he also suggested that the small *vel* placed in his forehead between the eyes, increased his abilities of extra sensory perception. Despite the pain and his “suffering” he also experienced “three times the happiness afterwards” and suggested there was an addictive quality to it especially if boons were attained. He said that some people assumed he had done some “bad things”, whilst others were “envious” and “jealous”, claiming he had “tricked God” as a “bribe”; some also understood it as an act of devotion.

He had undertaken *pirathishtakkaavadi* (rolling *kaavadi*) aged nineteen out of curiosity and when afterwards things went well in his life, he undertook it again. His life improved yet more with promotions at work, increased salary; later his needs became more critical

and as he passed the temple each day on his way to work, he would ask Murugan “to give me this impossible thing by this particular time” and again he attained his ‘impossible’ request. It was some years after this that he undertook the more severe *paravaikkaavadi* in fulfillment of the vow. His mother was unhappy, and suggested there was “something wrong” with him, his father would not go to support him but his sister did, and said she felt proud of him and was “honoured”, however his friends warned him not to do it as it would be too painful. Sivam claimed to do it for “my people” and that it conferred him with a state of “grace” that passed from him to them, making him Murugan’s messenger: “people see god in you”. He avoided going into a trance as this would have caused him embarrassment, but felt that he could have done.

Another interviewee aged twenty-three, a student, also claimed to have a ‘special’ interest in suspended *kaavadi* and had made several video recordings of others, before undertaking it himself for the first time. He had suffered severe stomach pains over many months and visited a doctor who could find nothing wrong, after continued complaints he was admitted to hospital for tests, which he underwent on three separate occasions but still nothing was diagnosed. After his third admission he decided to make a vow to the Swami (God) and was freed from his pain: he now believes his faith and the abilities of the Swami are greater than medicine. Whilst on the one hand he emphasised the necessity of “*nambikkai*” – faith, he was also dismissive of the spiritual preparations and was uneasy and distracted during the interview. He related the story of an acquaintance of his who had been refused a visa to escape abroad; but when he showed the immigration officer his *kavaadi* scars claiming they were the result of torture, he received his visa. He perceived this as further evidence of the Swami’s protection and help; not as a clever ruse to fool the immigration department. He also spontaneously mentioned that ‘other’ devotees undertook their vows following imprisonment and torture. My next encounter was more complete: I met Ramesh and his entourage at the temple where he was just about to start the ritual.

A *thuukkukkaavadi* performance

I witnessed many *thuukkukkaavadi* performances and came to understand the subtle distinctions as well as conformities underlying these ceremonies; there was uniformity to the technique, but of course the individuals themselves brought their own stories and histories. I carried out numerous semi-structured interviews of limited success, and held more fruitful informal conversations over the ensuing weeks and months with the *thuukkukkaavadi* organiser, devotees and their families, attempting to build up a picture of what was occurring and to some extent why. I also spoke to those who had no direct connection with *thuukkukkaavadi* devotional practice and listened to their views. In this way, I came to appreciate how silence, that all pervasive quality to life in the north, has in some measure been symbolically transferred to the *thuukkukkaavadi* ceremony itself. The silence is represented through the use of ‘mouth locks’: the *vel* piercing both cheeks that effectively disables speech and which in ancient times symbolically quietened the devotee to better contemplate God. It invoked little criticism from the local population, most of whom generally supported it as a serious devotional act; a few older Hindu devotees of the Navalar tradition were opposed to it as ‘gimmicky’, pagan and overly mystical however. The following are two descriptions that both typify and provide a unique picture of the differing aspects: the first typifies the more ‘traditional’ *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee; the second typifies the newer devotees who are undertaking this vow as a result of their war experiences.

I arranged to meet the *thuukkukkaavadikkara inthu* (organiser) at the Manjavanappathy Kovil (Pillaiyar temple) in the village of Kokkuvil, at 7.00 a.m. where the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee and his group of relatives, friends and village neighbours would begin their journey. The temple had been badly bombed during the war and was currently undergoing repairs. The *thuukkukkaavadikkara* arrived on his motorbike, green shawl flapping behind him, his long white beard and the evidence of *thuukkukkaavadi* scars is clear on both his back and legs; he cuts a somewhat authoritative figure, followed in procession by his two sons and four other trainees on the tractor that will be employed to carry the devotees. They all appear eager and say they are anticipating the energisation that the ceremony always brings in the fulfilment of this sacred duty. They bring many

items including: *kaavadi* frame, offerings of plantains, coconuts, areca nuts, camphor, margosa leaves and limes, which would be taken home by the priest later. The *kaavadi* itself is a wooden arched frame, about a meter in height and weighing approximately fifteen kilos, and represents the hill deity, Lord Muruga. On each side of the arch is attached a plume of brilliant blue and green peacock feathers and on top a pyramid of brightly decorated red and white paper and foil petals in a pyramid and sitting atop, a small wooden, brightly coloured parrot (*kili*). Inside the arch on a small cross-beam, the lime is hung to ward off evil. The *kaavadi* is placed against a pillar in the outer courtyard (*yaggasalai*) of the temple where all the food offerings are displayed: uncooked rice, coconuts, areca nuts, betel leaves, plantains, all to be given to the *kurukkal* (non-Brahman priest) later.

Whilst the organiser and his followers make preparations to the tractor, scaffolding, ropes and decorations, the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee arrives with his wife, baby and an elder relative I later discover to be his paternal uncle. The rest of the family and villagers – around thirty in all, including children, arrive shortly afterwards dressed in their finest clothes: silk saris, party dresses for the younger girls and *panjabis* for the unmarried women. The men are all wearing *verstis* either white or white covered in a second wrap of coloured cloth. The *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee Ravi, is 32 years old and has been married for twelve years, he and his wife, Jamilla have a baby son aged 8 months and their vow was in thanks for the birth of this son, after over a decade of childlessness. He is a tall, strong looking man, but also appears slightly apprehensive. Ravi works as a labourer in one of the many agricultural farms on the peninsula; he lives very close to the Pidari Amman kovil in his village, which is situated some 3 kilometres away and he is a regular devotee. That day was the *theetham* (water cutting) ceremony at his village temple, culminating the festival that had taken place over the previous 12 days and was the highlight of the village year; he had decided that this was an auspicious day on which to perform the ceremony.

He had, like all other devotees I came to know, heard about the organiser through word of mouth from others who had performed the ritual – one of those it later transpired was his paternal uncle. He chose to do *paravaikkaavadi* (flying bird) – arguably the most closely referential to Lord Muruga through his *vahana* (vehicle), the *mayil* (peacock), because he

was to carry his small son with him hanging from a sling attached to ropes at his side. In terms of preparation, Ravi had undertaken a 10 day fast, which meant no food until midday and no meat, he abstained from alcohol and attended the temple regularly. An auspicious day is chosen by the devotee, which usually relates to their local deity's yearly festival - in this case Pidari Amman, on either the *theer* or *theetham* day (chariot and water cutting ceremonies). He then visited the organiser and they discussed meeting times, payment and any equipment that would be required. No information is sought as to the reasons for the vow – it is held to be a sacred and secret undertaking, shared only with immediate family and possibly close friends; neither is it a subject for speculation or conversation. However, in this instance it is obvious because of the presence of the baby. The role of the organiser as stated previously, is practical in terms of professional organisation but also one of great trust and respect – he is chosen for his skills and this is based entirely on reputation and long experience, propagated by word of mouth throughout the region; it is possible to locate the organiser by asking in the neighbourhood, he is a well-known figure and has developed the style of suspended *kaavadi* that is unique to the Jaffna peninsula.

At the temple the atmosphere is relaxed and unhurried at this early stage; everyone is waiting for the *kurukkal* to arrive. Ravi changes into a ceremonial white silk *versti* (dhoti), worn tied up between his legs and tucked in and he wears the sandalwood *urukamam* beads that denote his vegetarian diet. There is very little mixing between parties; the organiser having spoken briefly to Ravi with some factual details, then waits at a distance with his group – everyone chatting and relaxed: children are present and everyone is dressed in their finest clothes as a mark of respect to the deity and the devotee. Ravi appears slightly tense but denies this and claims to feel calm.

With the arrival of the priest at 8.45 a.m, there is a sense of things getting going; there is more activity and as the *puja* is initiated with the breaking of a coconut at the entrance to the temple, signifying the breaking of the ego (Duraismamy 1997). The *kurukkal* blesses the devotee, his baby and the hooks before the group circumambulates the temple in a clockwise direction, and finally the priest receives his food offerings. Ravi then goes just outside the entrance to the temple where a mat has been placed on the ground and he lies down face down, chin resting on his clasped hands, surrounded by relatives in a fairly

small, tight circle with the organiser and his son in the centre. This circle contains most of the men and some small boys, the women wait more anxiously outside the circle, but nearby. The organiser and his son kneel either side of him and each take a piece of flesh at shoulder height, massage and kneed it and then very quickly insert the hooks, which require some exertion. This initiates cries from the womenfolk of “*arohara*” (invoking the gods name); it is a very emotional moment in recognition of the seriousness and devotion of this act. He appears completely impassive, as are the male members of the group who look on intently with great concentration. Not only is his face impassive but there is no clenching of hands or muscles. As he appears calm, further hooks are inserted in the lower back, upper thighs and calves; the entire procedure taking no more than a couple of minutes. There is also no bleeding – this is put down to the protection of the deity who is said to control bleeding and the pain in devotees with sufficient *nambikkai* (faith) in her/him.

Ropes are attached to the hooks, large knots secure them and the weight is tested by pulling on these ropes which suddenly lifts him a few inches off the ground; this is done in a perfunctory manner and without any hesitation or gentleness, although the ropes are tested with care and attention. Ravi then quickly stands up to have the spear (*vel*) inserted through his cheeks and promptly faints; with great efficiency the organiser and his son get water, check on his well-being and soon he is revived and stands up. The *vel* is quickly inserted and only at this point when he has finished does the organiser ask him if he is OK (“*sariya?*”) and ready to continue; he nods affirmatively and without hesitation. No-one else speaks to him or intervenes other than to assist in some practical measures such as carrying water, there is no panic or alarm and it would seem little inclination to consider stopping: there is the sense that this would not be expected. He is then given the *thuukkukkaavadi* to carry on his shoulders – these can weigh as much as fifteen kilogrammes. He, his wife, and the rest of us apart from the organiser and his son, go once again around the temple, calmly, no-one is talking. Later many of the women confess to finding it difficult to watch, but at the same time they claim to be filled with admiration and respect for his act of devotion.

Back at the mat he again lies down, after the *thuukkukkaavadi* has been removed in order to attach the ropes to the tractor; the ropes are passed through a pulley system, which lifts

him from the ground upwards so that he is suspended horizontally in the air, as though flying like a bird. Considerable time is spent adjusting the ropes so they are in perfect balance, otherwise he would be tipped up or plunged too far towards the ground: another member of the group sits atop the scaffold bouncing so that it moves up and down slowly, giving even more the impression that he is flying. A green cloth is tied to the ropes nearest his waist, forming a sling (*thuuli*). His baby is slid carefully into the sling face up – he has been impervious to the entire proceedings and is happily placed in the sling and remains contentedly lying there for the whole journey, a walk of over several hours (see photo 10, p.226). Baby and father have Holy Ash (*vibuthi*) and sandalwood paste (*Kurumam*) applied to their foreheads and Ravi is then handed a bunch of margosa leaves and a *vel* for either hand and he begins to sway his arms as though flapping wings; this has a dual purpose – to stop the muscles from seizing up and as a referent to Lord Muruga's vehicle; the *mayil*. The organiser and his son both break a coconut below Ravi and his baby to signal the start of the procession itself, which begins by circumambulation of the chariot house (*theerveedu*).

En route, traffic gives way to the procession, people stare, the women walk on the left side in front and the men on the right to the side and behind – they have a greater responsibility to observe and maintain safety. At each cross roads where there is a known *kovil*, camphor is lit and a coconut broken. Along the narrow lanes, the closer we are to the village temple, trees and branches have to be negotiated and swept to one side, the tractor manoeuvred around tight bends, none of which seems to cause Ravi any discomfort – he appears relaxed and aware of his surroundings, occasionally looking about him.



Photo 10. *Paravaikkaavadi* - Father and son

Throughout the journey, the figure sitting atop the scaffolding has the strenuous task of bouncing the wooden planks jutting out over the tractor and Ravi continues to wave his arms slowly through the humid air. The rest of the party walk slowly beside, behind and in front of the tractor; women remaining together and the males forming a separate group, the atmosphere is now fairly sociable with chatting between people both from within the group and others stopping along the way. Any earlier emotional distress from the women has completely subsided, apart from sporadic outcries of “*arohara*” there does not appear to be any overt concern other than the practical negotiation of the road. It also provides me with an opportunity to chat with the other female walkers and I meet both family and neighbours; all are filled with a sense of awe and respect for his actions and it is implicitly understood that he must make a vow to thank Lord Muruga for hearing and granting his boon. This is a family in which other members have already performed *thuukkukkaavadi*, I met also families where this was the first experience of a relative undertaking the vow and in these families there was more anxiety regarding the harshness of the undertaking.

On arrival at the Pidari Amman kovil, the *theetham* is progressing so there is already a large number of people present and a very festive atmosphere. Crowds pour in and out of the temple, some are congregated on the sand under trees. Our arrival increases this bustle and activity, the group again circumnavigates the temple in a clockwise direction, pausing at the entrance towards the Great Hall (*Maha Mandapam*) which affords a view of the Amman deity and the other *utsava murthi* (deity images) taken around the temple during festival time. Here the bouncing of the scaffolding becomes more pronounced, Ravi looks with intensity towards the image with the purpose of being seen (*darshan*) by Amman and then the procession continues around until reaching the front (the *Yaggasalai*). Here the *kaavadi* is replaced on his shoulders and the baby is carefully removed from the sling; it appears strangely as though Ravi is giving a second birth to this son, who is then returned to its mother. Ravi is lowered to the ground in an upright position and with great speed the hooks are all removed and the skin around the entry points of the hooks is firmly massaged in order to encourage blood to flow – this is considered cleansing and is believed to aid recovery; in Ravi’s case there is no bleeding however. He, along with the group walks briskly around the temple carrying the *kaavadi*

and arrives at the *stampa mandapam* (hall) where the vehicle of the deity is situated - the *vahanam*, the *Balipeedam* (Sacrificial altar) and the *Kodi Stamban* (flag staff); here the priest blesses Ravi and his son. The group then separates and Ravi, his wife and baby stand in a huddle outside, he looking exhausted. The organiser and his assistants are quick to pack everything away and waste no time; I ask him how he feels it went and if he is tired, but he merely beams and says he feels revitalised.

One of the unusual aspects of the performance of *thuukkukkaavadi* that I saw was the fact that very few devotees went into trance; many I spoke to said they were either not in trance or were not in full trance, being aware of their surroundings to a greater or lesser degree. But what was important was some element of faith (*nambikkai*), every person interviewed said that confidence in their particular deity whether it be Lord Muruga, Pidari Amman, Mariamman, all professed total conviction that the deity would protect and safeguard them against pain, or accident. There have been some instances of other organisers working who are less experienced and responsible who have had disasters with the scaffolding breaking or some other catastrophe, I was curious to know how this would be perceived. Ravi for instance took a pragmatic approach and claimed the wood would have been rotten; he did not identify the questionable faith of the supplicant or the ire of the deity as a cause, calling to mind Evans-Pritchards' (1976) analysis of Azande explanations concerning the collapsing of the granary.

My interview with Ravi after the ceremony, a couple of days later, yielded little information: this is in part due to the interview circumstances, which are usually very public but even at individual interviews talking about *thuukkukkaavadi* was mostly unsatisfying. On this occasion there were numerous people present from the family and the village; a considerable amount of information was received from Ravi's sister, which was frequently the case; female members of the family often seemed more willing to provide information and communicated most easily. This was undoubtedly due to my status as female and that of my assistant, also female. But even when I became well acquainted with devotees, there was a difficulty in articulating the experience and I came to understand that this was because it is not something discussed at any depth: not between devotees, family members, friends, or the organizer. Instead there appears to be

an implicit understanding of what it is about that goes beyond language. When spoken about, it is at a fairly pragmatic level concerning the business side of the undertaking.

He and his wife had been married for twelve years; she is a cross-cousin. His mother, a Hindu, is deceased and his father whom I meet later, is a Roman Catholic and his sister is there to represent the family and provide him with support. After two years of marriage his wife had a still-birth and following this he had made a vow that if they conceived and had a child he would perform the *thuukkukkaavadi* ritual. Eight months prior to the ceremony his wife had given birth to a healthy boy. He said he had complete faith and trust in the *swami* to protect him, he had trust in the organiser based on his experience and reputation; this was an important aspect but in a material rather than spiritual sense – the organiser is seen as a very devout, serious person in terms of his role but not in any way a holy or religious person with special powers. Their relationship is fairly superficial, in this instance they had not met in person until the day itself and there is no information regarding reasons, no offering of spiritual guidance and there is no contact afterwards – unless the devotee wishes to carry out a further devotion over the ensuing years. There were no further preparations. He professed no pain and when I asked about his apparent fainting spell, he claimed to have been overcome with tiredness.

During the *thuukkukkaavadi* ceremony, he concentrated largely on the Pidariamman deity to control the pain, he did not go into a trance; the music, which for some is an essential element in bringing about a sense of elation and in some an aid to trance, was for Ravi of no particular relevance or assistance. He did not chant any mantras, which again for some proves helpful in concentrating the mind, but he emphasised frequently the aspect of faith and confidence in the deity. His uncle who was present at the interview also described his experiences and was open about his reasons for performing suspension *kaavadi*. He is 53 years old and took *thuukkukkaavadi* between 1971 and 1988, a total of seven times – mostly *thulukkaavadi* whereupon the devotee hangs by two hooks only attached to the upper back region (see photo 7, p.203). His initial reason for doing suspension *kaavadi* was for the well-being of his family and when this proved successful, he continued and each time felt fulfilled. He also emphasised that one must have total confidence in the *swami* and their ability to grant protection and help, when needed: help that is deemed worthy, rather than a shopping list of requests.

It is noteworthy in this instance that of both temples involved in Ravi's *thuukkukkaavadi* ritual, neither were Murugan temples; this is a recent change with the involvement of other Amman deities. In terms of the origin of this ceremony Amman is not traditionally associated with it, so all the symbols related to Murugan are absent within these other temples, but all are still employed within the ceremony itself i.e the *vel*, the emblem of the peacock – Muruga's *vahana*, and the *kaavadi* itself representing the story of Murugan's battle with Idumban at Palani. The spread of the practice to include these other temples – especially the Amman and Pillayar temples suggests that she offers something else. She is for example more demanding; Mariamman is known to spread disease if angered through neglect and receives regular propitiations to appease her – margosa leaves used in most ceremonies are said to prevent the spread of chicken pox, measles and mumps. The notion of Amman as a disease bringing deity as well as a benign and kindly one, and Murugan as a less demanding, disease curing deity, work as a powerful unifying force for protection of their devotees. Pillaiyar is also known for assisting in new beginnings and is therefore an auspicious deity to make homage to and is included in all ceremonies.

A contemporary devotee

I came across Ramesh, as he was starting his *thuukkukkaavadi* ritual outside the Vairavar temple of the large Agamic temple of Kanthaswamy Muruga Kovil. I was living on the temple site and as such had frequent and open access to most of the ceremonies and events taking place, not only there but also in the surrounding areas – the suburb was replete with temples and wedding halls and other places of Hindu influence and teaching. This temple conforms to the traditions of Saivite Agamic cosmic law that stipulates the design, building and order of service held in the temple. *Pujas* are held punctually and at regular times and the ceremonies are performed by Brahmanic priests. The temple is owned and managed by a family of the *Vellala* caste and has been for many generations. They are responsible for the maintenance of the temple, payment of the priests, and to uphold the tenets of Hindu Shaiva Siddhantism, which is based on the religio-

philosophical system of the Agamas; scriptures from the 7th and 8th centuries concerning religious and philosophical thought (Perinbanayagam 1982). Shaiva Siddhantism, as espoused by the Hindu scholar Arumulgar Navalar, has more recently given way to an increased interest in non-Agamic village worship, with an uprise in devotion to local Amman deities such as Mariamman, Verumaikaliyamman and Pidariamman. This suggests a possible connection with changes wrought by the war: perhaps there are fears that the lack of propitiations and worship of Amman had wrought her displeasure, bringing war to these village communities. Unhappiness at the loss of their local deities, the intensity of their need during the atrocities of war and the absence of perceived protection through the usual Agamic forms of worship and compounded by the absence of the high caste, Hindu reformist *Vellalas* abroad, has perhaps increased the worship of these deities. Were their explanations related to the anger of these deities at the forgetfulness of the villagers towards them? The Kanthaswamy/ Murugan temple remained open for all but the briefest period of time during the war and was a place of refuge and safety during the many bombing campaigns.

The *vel* was in the process of being inserted through Ramesh's cheeks and the *naga* (snake) head attached so that it protruded from the mouth, speech thereafter would be impossible. Four hooks attached to the skin and muscle of the back, were in place with thick ropes hanging down. Before the remaining four hooks were inserted in the lower limbs, he, his relatives and some fellow villagers and myself went into the temple. He walked in a clockwise direction around the inner courtyard and then he began to run, appearing to be in a full trance state: staggering, lurching and weaving, looking distressed, tearful and unaware of the people around him. A relative held tightly on to the ropes seeming to control and manage his movements, holding him back at times and preventing him from careering off. Once outside, he appeared calmer, he lay on the mat face down and had the remaining hooks inserted in his upper thighs and calves. The women watching were crying and clearly upset – at this point I falsely assumed this was concerning what was occurring in the present in our midst, as well as the physical pain that he must be enduring, but I was later to discover that the locus of their distress came from somewhere else entirely.

Fuller Collins (1997) writes of the joyousness of the *kaavadi* ritual and of the spectators and other devotees; this was mostly absent from the ceremonies I witnessed, which seemed instead to invoke grief or silent concentration, rather than joy.

Some of those present were aware of this family's circumstances (see below), others were not but like myself, could conjecture possible reasons from knowledge of the prevalence of this ritual among those who had been imprisoned. It became clear that the distress being expressed by these women had less to do with a sense of squeamishness and more to do with their understanding of the context that had lead him to undertake such a harsh act – knowledge acquired through their own personal experiences of conflict and suffering. The men on the other hand were serious, impassive and silent, including the several small boys watching intently; most of the men crowded around closely and watched the organiser as well as Ramesh, with arms folded and puckered brows. Loud devotional music was playing from speakers attached to the tractor, no-one was talking and very few people came to watch from neighbouring houses at this point.

Finally he was raised from the ground while great care was taken to balance and adjust the ropes and watch his expression to assess his degree of comfort/discomfort. Suddenly he appeared no longer to be in a trance and was fully aware of his surroundings, looking about him, calm and with no obvious signs of distress. He was handed a *vel* and some margosa leaves for each hand and he began to sway his arms as though flapping wings; above him sitting on top of the scaffolding at the forward end was another assistant who bounced the scaffolding so that he was also moving up and down, all of which gave the impression of a giant bird in flight.

He and the rest of the company then leave for his village and the Kaliyamman (fearsome war goddess) temple, where he will later celebrate over a communal meal given for the entire village, after a *puja* performed by the temple priest. On the journey back to the village some five miles away, I talk to some of the other family and friends accompanying him en route. Many are unaware of why he is doing the vow, his cousin thinks it is because he was ill when living in the Vanni where he and his family had been displaced during the war. It is also stated at one point that his job (labouring) has been going badly and he has made some bad financial decisions, which have lead him to make

a vow for assistance. In subsequent meetings more is revealed and gradually his story and that of his family comes to light.



Photo 11. *Paravaikkavaadi*

It is his mother who finally relates the story of her family's trials: Ramesh's elder brother was arrested during the war, suspected of helping the LTTE. He was taken off by the special forces to an army camp and, in accordance with previous experience following arrests, it was assumed that he would never be seen again. Locals state that following an arrest the prisoner will join the vast ranks of those who have disappeared during the war and will never be seen again: they will disappear and funeral plans and preparations will be made immediately, I was told. Miraculously in this case, he was released, having been tortured and then after many months returned to his family. His mother made a vow to the Goddess Kali that some form of boon would be given in thanks for her divine intervention, but she did not specify what form this would take. A short while later, she went with her younger son Ramesh, to have his charts read and was told by the astrologer that he was at great risk of some life threatening problem, at this it was independently

decided by the younger son, to perform *thuukkukkaavadi* to Kalamman and Lord Muruga.

His mother was reluctant to allow him to perform such an austere vow but he was insistent that he perform this both for himself and for his brother's safe release. She refused to go to the first temple to watch but remained at their village temple; when he returned with the *thuukkukkaavadi* she went to their house and waited for him there. His sister was sent with him to the first temple but was overcome with distress and was sent home by relatives, his elder brother stayed; no doubt partly because the vow was being carried out on his behalf. Other male and distant female relatives and villagers and friends were present to support him.

He appeared euphoric afterwards, was limping slightly but claimed to experience no discomfort. At our initial interview as with the previous devotee, I had to adjust my expectations as to what information I would be able to glean: we sat in a room, formally laid out with four chairs; one for myself, my female translator/assistant and opposite, a chair for Ramesh and his uncle - a silent and rather intimidating observer. Around the room, standing, were other members of the family and village - word having got around quickly of my arrival. Outside looking in through the glassless windows, other villagers peered silently in, whispering occasionally. In the more informal atmosphere earlier everyone had appeared cheerful, friendly and welcoming; somehow this atmosphere changed and the ambience became more tense and unduly formal; I made great efforts to 'lighten' the interview, but mostly without success. However, the minute I got up to leave, everyone relaxed, photos were taken and I was asked questions which I gladly answered - this despite having suggested, without a response, that anyone could ask me questions at the outset of the interview. There may have been some relief that I had not posed any difficult or contentious questions. In subsequent meetings I would 'drop in', having been told that this was acceptable and would encourage a more relaxed and conducive atmosphere, rather than creating anxiety with formal interviewing and note-taking. At these times, different members of the family and village would be present and generally it was much easier to talk: it was on one of these occasions that Ramesh's mother spoke of her family's experiences. Ramesh and his mother both felt the vow had been successfully fulfilled, his mother hoped not to be repeated, but Ramesh said he

would consider doing so again, should the need arise and the circumstances be appropriate.

Pirathattai: rolling

Pirathattai is another form of vow made during Hindu festivals that has some connections and similarities to *thuukkukkaavadi*. Mainly devotees undertake this vow, which involves rolling along the ground over often large distances, for a variety of reasons that range from recovery from ill health, help in exams or business to release from imprisonment. In 2004 on one festival day there was a recorded 1,200 people rolling around the perimeter of the Murugan temple in Jaffna. Many have come from far distances – sometimes as much as seven kilometres and they undertake to do this every day usually for the duration of the festival, in the case of the Jaffna Murugan festival this would be twenty-five days.

Again it is a vow that is not discussed openly outside those who do it in small groups of three or five, mostly for moral support and encouragement when endurance is weak in the first couple of days. When performing the vow in a small group, the first in line calls out the sacred name, “*arohara, Muruga*” or other sacred names including those of Murugan’s wives’: Valli and Devasena, which is then echoed by the others, keeping spirits focussed and commitment to the vow high. Companions walk alongside: wives, sisters, or friends offering quiet encouragement. Many devotees I spoke to described a feeling of upliftment, an opportunity to focus on the divine and therefore a diminishment of thoughts about problems and worries. Again some devotees are in a trance state (of varying levels or degrees) and some not; they also report feeling physically exhausted, drained and nauseous in the beginning with severe disorientation but after the first couple of days this disappears and most are able to roll with comparative ease and state that they feel calm, happy and energised by it.

One devotee first undertook *pirathattai* in 1996 when he was eighteen years old: quick to point out that it was not as a result of a vow but out of the need to set himself a challenge, he now does it as an act of devotion. He suggested many are now doing it as a

consequence of the trials they experienced during the war and mentioned those who made the vow whilst in prison, thus linking it to the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees.

Another devotee likened the experience to a drama or a temple ritual, suggesting that this (drama and *pirathattai*) were more efficacious than counselling, which he felt was less successful in the “closed”, “rigid” and “suspicious” community of Jaffna. However, Jaffna is a place where quiet space is at a minimum and therefore temple festivals and rituals are important to provide these much needed areas of peace and tranquillity. Most give up meat and fish for the duration of the festival and fast (miss breakfast) the day before. Many also spoke of feelings of calmness and satisfaction following rolling that is similar to and reflected in *thuukkukkaavadi*, although here the reasons for undertaking the vow are perhaps more austere – it has been suggested by devotees that the severity of the vow relates to the severity of the incident for which the original request for a divine boon was made. *Paravaikkaavadi* for example, which has more hooks is in fact less severe than the *thulakkaavadi* where there is only one or two hooks that must support the entire weight of the body. But generally, it appears that *pirathattai* is very similar to *kaavadi* in that it is performed as part of a vow, often made under extreme pressure. Almost all devotees mentioned its increase and linked it with incidences of imprisonment and/or torture.

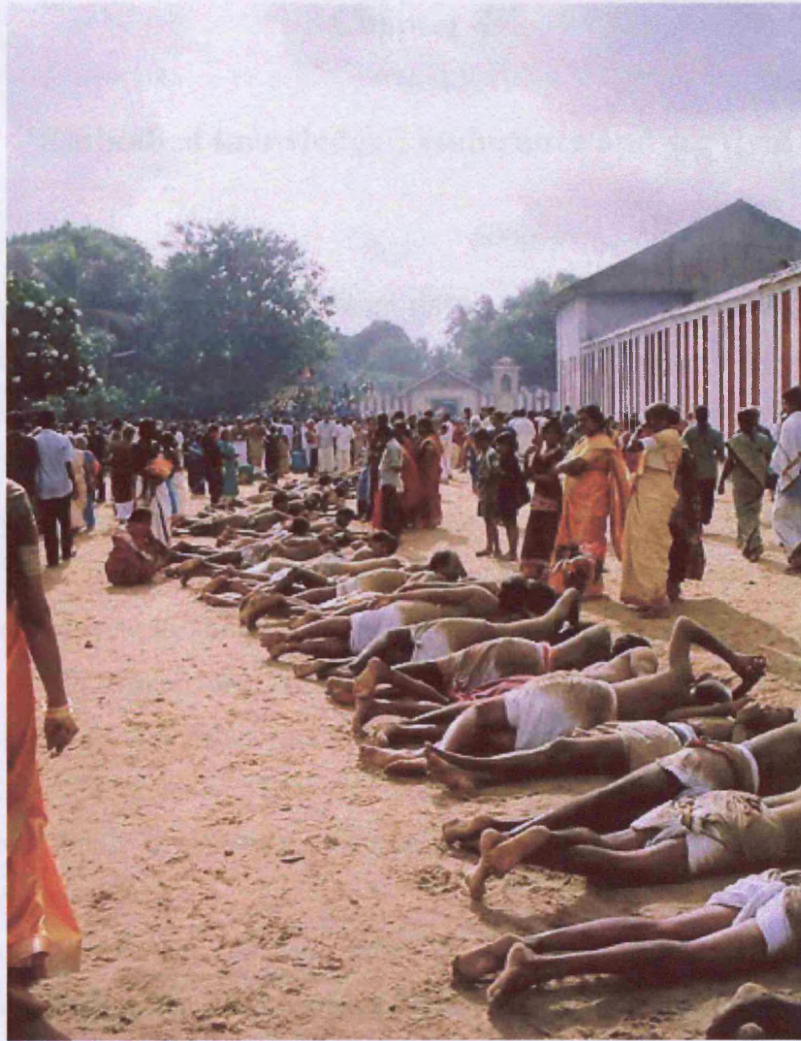


Photo 12. *Pirathattai*

Chapter 8

‘Embodied knowledge’: endurance and survival

Recent studies have attempted to relocate the body centrally in social, economic and political expression. Resurfacing after centuries of marginalisation following Descartes’ famous dictum that contributed to the segregation of mind from matter and materialist science from metaphysics, the body has now been decisively recognised as possessing both authority and agency. This reassertion of the body began at the start of the twentieth century with Heidegger’s (1962) [1927] notions on the senses: not only sight and hearing, but touch, smell and explorations of mortality that confronted the most important aspects of corporeality. He argued that thinking alone cannot assist our understanding of the world and experience, but rather experiences are shaped by our physical presence within it – ‘*dasein*’, or ‘being there’. This, of course, could be the argument of an extreme materialist, or of Freud in the early 1890s; that if there is no mind, then what remains is only the body’s brain.

Marx, Durkheim, and Mauss – writing before Heidegger, and later Foucault have all been credited with asserting the significance of the body within sociological, political and philosophical traditions: from descriptions of the learned behavioural aspects of the body in the social world, to more overtly political connections of the body in relation to hegemonic state regularisation. Critically, analyses that situate the body as a focus of restraint and control have particular relevance in studies of state violence.

Foucault (2004) [1978] describes how scrutiny by the dominant structures and institutions (either real or imagined) is a way of constraining and monitoring the social body - of particular significance I would suggest, in the context of Sri Lankan Tamil society, which is dominated by covert surveillance and observation. However, these ideas are limited in their analyses of the body, situating it as a passive object onto which cultural symbols are transposed rather than the active agent of its own subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty (1963) re-introduced the body-as-subject through ontological studies that sought to take greater note of embodied human agency. Thus breaking away from dualist

ideas that promulgated the notion of the body as object, deterministically unreflective and largely ignorant of emotion, he repositioned it within a fully sentient 'intercorporeality' (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:51). Merleau-Ponty builds on the work of Mauss through his emphasis on carnal intersubjectivity that calls attention to the 'primordial relationship' (p.52) between our bodies and our being-in-the-world; one in which perception and body are inextricably interwoven, and at the same time functioning through culturally informed techniques and understandings. Eco (1986) argued that the body is an interactive instrument, integrated with its own cultural identity as well as a site of conformity and resistance, or social restraint and explication (Edgar and Sedgwick 1999).

In reaching beyond the purely phenomenological aspects of embodiment however, it was Goffman (1971) who sought to understand how the body was connected and engaged with social action. His emphasis on the "bodily *production* of social hierarchy, dominance and control" (authors' italics, Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 56) re-contextualised the body within society. Social order, according to Goffman's theory is maintained through publicly ascribed techniques of the body involving complex and conventionalised social rituals aimed at the successful negotiation of social space. Settings that are highly contentious or under close observation for actions that are deemed to work against the conventions of social order are especially fraught with risk for anyone caught within these spaces. Gestures and tics reveal what is often left unsaid and therefore negotiating physical space in occupied territory can be seen as particularly challenging; for although the voice may be silent, the body is not.

Tamil travellers crossing the military checkpoints provide an example of how the body transacts and interfaces with other (hostile) bodies. Talking is mostly absent during these temporal interludes where one is suddenly posited in a no-man's-land - in an embodied, social and political sense, to negotiate and intersect these unfamiliar territories with their different set of rules, whilst under strict surveillance. Bodily boundaries are also transgressed with searches of person and baggage, repeatedly. There is little overt affinity among the passengers but this belies an alertness and watchfulness that becomes more evident at the checkpoints, suggesting a certain protectiveness to be found among the travellers. Each person's movements are monitored, numbers are counted at each stop

and a more subtle observation by fellow passengers takes place and engenders a feeling of reassurance. For example, on a couple of occasions when called off the bus separately to be checked, my return was acknowledged by the gestures, if not the words of my fellow travellers. Smiles, eye contact, and raised eyebrows were familiar gestures registering acknowledgement of my presence and were a comfort that made me aware of the notice given to travellers' physical absence and location. Bodily presence counted in the void of verbal articulation. Although I would always be offered food on these trips (rarely accepted in reciprocation), only the briefest of conversations would take place during the long journey that saw most passengers keep to themselves. The checkpoints encapsulated the tension between the government troops, the militants and the Tamil civilian population especially during periods of political unease; the locus of contestation became the bodies of Tamil civilian travellers attempting to negotiate these uncertain spaces. If the soldiers became more aggressive, rougher in their handling of people, louder - the Tamils could only respond passively, resigned to familiar positions and postures of subjugation, but there were some who were more openly angered by these impositions. They were mostly older Tamils some of whom would silently refuse to get off the bus at the checkpoints; they did not openly express their resentment and anger but stayed in their seats, remaining unchallenged and unhindered. These trials were mild in comparison to the impositions placed on the Tamils living within occupied territory during the height of the war, whose bodies were checked, searched and subjected to humiliating and personal violence on a regular, daily basis.

The experience of imprisonment, torture and the complex issues of reintegration following such experiences have resonance with Goffman's work on stigma (1969) [1963]. I would suggest that efforts to realign oneself with the prevailing ordinariness of society after such extreme experience would be made more arduous by the body's duplicity - recognised through its 'spoiled identity' (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:59). Perhaps the 'stigma symbols' of the torture victim (defined either by physical scars or local knowledge of absence) are transposed with another kind of mark - the stigmata scars of the *kaavadi* devotee. Through their transcendence from stigmatised to stigmata-cised they are also endowed with an ability to bestow special powers of healing during the performance of *thuukkukkaavadi*. The body has a key role in negotiating this spoiled

identity and becomes the mediator between social and self-identity (p. 60), thereby enabling an element of empowerment - at least for the duration of this particular act of devotion, if not beyond.

Recognising the work of Bourdieu, ethnographers such as the Comaroffs (1992) James (1988) and Shaw (2002) have examined the role of remembering through interactions of the body. They suggest that external events are shaped and negotiated through bodily transactions that are non-discursive, but able to give meaning to the present. Shaw argues cogently for the relevance of memories of “rupture” (p.5), as much as the more cohesive and settled past, (the authenticity of which she rightly questions) through a habitus that is inclusive of *all* experience, including the disruptive. These violent disruptions are absorbed into the body and also therefore the social and cultural world, to be reproduced through performances such as rituals. Shaw warns of the dichotomising of ‘body versus text’, citing Giddens’s theory of ‘discursive and practical consciousness’ (p.7) distinguishing between that which is recalled verbally and that which is reproduced through action, and suggests instead that we look at verbally articulated narratives of the past in conjunction with forgotten and yet embedded memories contained within the body. Memories are not ‘uni-directional’ (p.265) processes she adds, but interlace past with present and present with past; they are less polarised, and more an amalgamate of experience and memory.

Specifically within the field of medical anthropology, there has also been a resurgence of interest in locating the body away from mere representation towards recognition of its corporeal presence as active agent. Attention has focussed on the reappearance of the body within studies of medical institutions, ritual healing, the impact of politico-economic forces on the body and examinations of the interactions of mind, body and society (Csordas 1994, Das 1997, Farmer 1997, Good, 1992, 1994; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). The Kleinmans’ (1994) have done much to bring attention to embodied expressions and how violence is remembered. They chart how bodily complaints enabled a critique of the harsh and repressive political system in China, during the Cultural Revolution and describe how atrocity was conveyed by the body in the face of attempts to silence growing dissent within the population. In particular they call for further of studies of bodily processes and social experience, a call that is cogently argued by

Desjarlais (1992) who locates the body in anthropological writings and calls for greater recognition of bodily experience in relation to pain and suffering.

He does this through a contextualised study of rural Himalayan Nepalese understandings of distress. The Nepalese illness trope 'soul loss' describes a state of lethargy, an absence of "passion" and sense of heaviness in the body all resulting from shock, and is said to cause the soul to take flight and roam loose, "prey to malevolent ghosts, demons and witches" (p.13). There was also a reticence in employing verbal explanations and opinions concerning causality; enquiries were greeted by silence when attempts were made to uncover explanations of cultural practice and local understandings. Desjarlais was confronted with the task of obtaining insights that employed different techniques to customary anthropological methodologies, as social norms forbade inquisitiveness about aspects of life deemed only accessible to certain members of the community; such as shamans or menfolk, or through fears of witchcraft that would be used if too much information were divulged. Instead, Desjarlais describes how his body came to change and adapt to embody local ways of being; his usual mode of moving, sitting, eating, walking changed and this assisted him both conceptually and experientially and he learned to utilise his own body in what he terms "embodied knowledge" (p.27) to understand local tropes and experiences of distress.

Many anthropologists similarly learn to subtly adjust and realign their bodies, not as a conscious decision but by participation in, and connection with the people and the physical environment in which they find themselves during fieldwork activities (Littlewood, 2004). By learning how to deport myself in an environment with strict rules regarding female behaviour and dress code, I also found it easier to participate in the rituals and ceremonies. At the start of a second visit, a year after having returned to a westernised life-style, I had to readjust once more to the behavioural and bodily norms expected of Jaffna Tamil women - despite not being one, but considered enough of an 'insider' by this time to conform to these ideals.

Shifts in 'embodied knowledge' can be subtle and are often inexplicit, needing to be worked out and discovered over time, but once understood they can lead to surprising and informative insights. So although the symbolic message given by the body is important, perhaps more so is the lived experience of the body in a visceral and corporal way: in this

instance the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee can be said to encapsulate the experiences of his social and familial group through the actions of his body. The suspended and silenced body of the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee also seems to call attention to the social body that is immobilised, constrained and silent.

The gang members causing so much consternation within the community are also using their bodies to convey and portray their experiences of suffering. They create dramas that incorporate the uncompromising style and behaviour they have identified from Tamil film heroes that seems best to encapsulate something of their own violent feelings, as well as their desire for heroic status. These youths have by contrast in real life felt anything but heroic; instead their experience has been one of an extraordinary brutality visited upon them; the violent aspects speak more eloquently and more familiarly to them than the acts of heroism. Locally, these films are frequently cited as the cause of aggression among the youth population in the north: they show scenes of almost cartoonish bloodshed and carnage more familiar to western film audiences perhaps. However, for those who have witnessed and taken part in the reality of bloodshed, these images could conjure an emotional response that in turn triggers further acts of violence.

The body as site of contestation

The body is a central and significant subjective entity that is both contested and resistive to dominating forces. Its authority lies in its subjective agency that reflects and expresses itself through individual and collective action, often when language is inadequate for the task. Through Feldman's (1991) semiotic analysis of political violence in Northern Ireland, and Ots' (1994) study of the upsurge and transformation of *qigong* in China, both have identified the body as a construct of resistance.

"Spontaneous-*qigong*" (p: 122) appeared in 1979 following the repression of the 'Democratic Movement' in China, which protested against the persecutions suffered during the Cultural Revolution. Unable to express their anger and fear, the traditional practice of 'crane-*qigong*' with its controlled, contained movements was transformed into the wilder and natural actions of 'spontaneous-*qigong*'. There was both a cathartic and a

resistive aspect to this, which was protesting against political oppression and personal loss. Many of its adherents went into trance states and seemed to find release in these often joyous and at times mournful acts of self-expression. However, with greater governmental criticism, repression and eventual legislation, these spontaneous outbursts became rare and silent. Many leaders of *qigong* have been forced to bureaucratise their groups through registration of membership: something not conducive to either safety within the critical context in which it operates, or the spontaneity of the practice. Ots proposes that such acts conform to certain cultural norms, for example *qigong* is a uniquely Chinese cultural form (as is *kaavadi* to the Tamils), but he also suggests that these can be restraining – even the catharsis of spontaneous-*qigong* operates within the boundaries of Chinese socio-cultural life. I would say however, that in societies that are heavily constrained there is little choice and that it is an act of bravery within such a hostile climate.

Ots also suggests that anthropologists should seek better awareness of their subjects by joining the action. This poses limitations for some anthropologists by the nature of both the action or performance itself and for example, gender relations: women do not undergo *thuukkukkaavadi*. During my observations of the performance there was much teasing about my taking part - not only in the full knowledge that this would never happen, but also in honest recognition of my status as outsider, woman and interested researcher of what was essentially a male practice. In this instance participant-observation however limited, had to suffice.

Within the context of war in Sri Lanka, the body has been a site of contestation in which many have been used as machines of war in battles that ultimately aim to control and commandeer the population into brutal submission. There have been many horrifying instances of the body's brutalised public display that instilled fear and silence during the insurgencies of both south and north. The violation of the body has been extreme, but I would also suggest that it has become a site of explanation and possible resistance following experiences of violence and oppression. By locating the body in the realm of subjective experience, it becomes not only the site of pain but also the agent of explication. Inscriptions of pain on the body translate the violence of war in a graphic, carnal and explicit way, and thereby expresses the unspeakable. As a site of contestation

however, it is first necessary to examine how depictions of the body are used to silence and instil fear into the population, before understanding how it has also become the corpus of emancipation.

Violence inscribed on the body sends a clear and visual message outwards towards society; visual images from war can serve to warn the populace of the consequences of dissent. Graphic portrayals of death are a tool with which military organisations and governments alarm their citizens into submission. For example, the Sri Lankan state television recently showed the video of the decapitation by militants, of the American and Spanish journalists in Iraq. There was scant warning of its nature prior to transmission. Their intention is not entirely clear, but it can be surmised that at this time of precarious political instability in Sri Lanka, this would serve as a salutary warning to the public of the horrors and consequences of terrorism perpetrated not only by Iraqi insurgents, but also groups such as the LTTE. A further subtext seems to be a warning about the interference of outsiders: journalists and others who attempt to expose other violence, perhaps of a more 'structural' kind (Farmer 1997). The body of the recent female suicide bomber who attempted to blow up the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) leader, Douglas Devananda, but instead killed herself and several policemen, was shown uncensored in the national newspapers, as are other assassination victims and their perpetrators who have died by suicide bombings or by the security services. Deaths are not routinely depicted in the government media, including recent deaths from the tsunami,^{lxviii} only those who are killed as a consequence of their involvement in apparent anti-government activities.

The insurgents also use graphic depictions of death and violence: as stated previously, they record all major battles and regularly screen them in public. At a recent temple festival in Jaffna, near the site of the temple itself a large screen was erected and battle videos were played: they portrayed cadres at the moment of their death lying in the arms of fellow comrades, as well as other scenes of explicit violence and armed combat.^{lxix} The messages again seem nuanced: as a recruitment tactic they serve to inspire and corral support for the movement especially among the younger population, but at the same time it is one that regards the body as disposable matter. In the past punishments were exposed and brought into the public domain to serve the dual purpose of a warning to those not in

complete alliance with the movement, as well as a show of strength and commitment. A hunger striker from the LTTE carried out his protest in open display near the main temple in Jaffna, so members of the public could demonstrate their support in an outpouring of grief in the days and weeks leading up to and including his death. There are yearly memorial anniversaries lasting the number of days of the hunger strike to remind the population of his professed sacrifice, heroism and eventual martyrdom. Again the subtext is one of fervour, commitment and strength posited against the idea of the body's disposability as a sacrificial entity. Another facet of the violence done to the body in order to both silence and subvert it is the violence perpetrated on women's bodies through rape.

Mourning expressed through the body is the work of women in India (Das 1997). The self-inflicted pain and grief laments of professional women mourners articulate loss and enable these losses to be recognised, witnessed and endured as a process of healing that leads mourners in the journey of re-incorporation back into the world. However, the violence of Partition that followed the withdrawal of the British from India in 1947, saw a reversal in mourning processes of women who had been raped; the verbally articulated laments were replaced by silence. Women's bodies were silent repositories for the violence that had been perpetrated against them and the body became "a parchment of losses"(p.84). Their memories of rape were a poison that "dissolved" the inside of their bodies. Through the use of metaphors and silence, women could claim agency and incorporate these traumas into their lives. Das suggests: "Just as a woman's body is made so that she can hide the faults of her husband deep within her, so she can drink all pain – take the stance of silence." (p.85). Littlewood (1997) suggests that women and children become seen as "legitimate targets" during civil war and this has certainly been borne out in the conflict in Sri Lanka where during the IPKF time, one senior Army officer explains to the relative of a woman raped by one of his soldiers: "I agree that rape is a heinous crime. But my dear, all wars have them. There are psychological reasons for them such as battle fatigue" (Hoole et al 1990).

During the two decades of war in Cambodia thousands of young men had limbs amputated due to injuries caused by landmines that were spread throughout the Thai-Cambodian border. Their struggle to manage the personal, economic and social

consequences of losing a limb was, according to French (1994) made more complex by the perceptions of those around them. These amputees became graphic signifiers of not only conflict, but also fear; French describes how their anger and hopelessness was articulated through increases in aggressiveness, alcohol abuse and petty acts of criminality. Rather than evoke compassion, the amputees have instead raised the fear and scorn of others in the community. She suggests that these attitudes to disfigurement are informed by Theravada Buddhist faith, in which each living creature is placed within a hierarchy of virtue according to the previous actions of all his/her previous lives and where physical wholeness is an essential component. These values have been a powerful influence in shaping both the self-perception of these young amputees and those non-disabled members of the community. The implications of this throws into question previously held notions of hierarchical positioning: it implies a fallen status within ideas related to karma and reincarnation and has left many questioning not only their economic and social losses, but also the uncertainties related to both their past and future lives.

The body as instrument of violence and resistance is also to be found among young (mostly) female self-cutters. There are websites devoted to their experiences and self-help groups are increasing throughout Europe and America. Superficially, there are undoubtedly parallels to be drawn with *kaavadi*, but there are also many more significant differences that make comparison with these and other religious acts of devotion/penance, irrelevant. Empowerment would seem to be one of the more significant albeit overly generalised comparisons that could be made between *kaavadi* devotees and those engaged in self-harming behaviour^{xx}. Otherwise, reasons for undertaking sacred acts of devotion that also include bodily pain - among many other things, differs from the act of privately self-inflicted pain towards the self as an outlet for frustration and hopelessness. Self-harm is perceived within western biomedical discourse as a disorder resulting from a variety of psychological mechanisms aimed at dealing with emotional pain and distress. The self-harming behaviour is said to dissociate the sufferer from psychic pain, emptiness, guilt and in order 'not to feel'; it is also associated with compulsive behaviour and feelings of depression. *Kaavadi* takes place across time and space; it reaches into the past, exists in the present and ensures a future, whilst connecting the individual and the community together in both a spiritual act of devotion and as a way

of redressing violence done to the body. Similarly, to examine the neurological and physiological mind and body states of devotees are overtly biomedical explorations, largely redundant in a thesis exploring local performative rituals.

The sacrificial body

At the 2005 annual Kanthaswamy festival, in a suburb just north of Jaffna there were between seventy and one hundred *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees during the 24th day *theer* ceremony, and again the following day at the 25th day *theetham* ceremony to mark the end of the festival. In pre-war years the numbers were approximately six or seven - throughout the peninsula. So what would lead to such a drastic increase and what would lead someone to engage in this particular form of devotional act, at this moment in time? Undoubtedly the worsening political situation and the recent tsunami had lead many to undertake the vow, but exploration of local exegeses was necessary in order to fully appreciate the significance of this particular ritual and its sudden increase over the war years.

Spiritually inspired self-hurting has been a method for worshippers to connect with their god(s) for centuries and in many different spiritual and ceremonial contexts, as individual acts of penance and initiation rites. Glucklich (2001) suggests that pain is usually defined as a problem that needs to be overcome and if possible, removed entirely. In the fields of medicine, law and the military the aim is to identify pain, eradicate it or at least subdue it. But through religious texts it is possible to see another way of understanding the experience of pain through a model of efficacy. In addressing questions concerning the “cultural construction of embodiment” (p.14) within pain discourses, Glucklich challenges Foucault on his theory of the “technology of self”(p.15), suggesting that pain is not always an internalisation of society’s aggression, but that there is some ambivalence in the experience of self-inflicted pain (as opposed to pain that is external, unwanted and beyond the individual’s self-control). It restores balance and order, it repays a debt, it is a form of ‘prestation’ or exchange and also an act of repentance – *thuukkukkaavadi*’s origins are to be found among the fishing community and among criminals. I would advocate that *thuukkukkaavadi* contains elements of the

inexpressibility and internalisation of social and political hegemony, but also it has efficacious qualities for practitioners and their fellow community members in terms of emancipation, reintegration and empowerment.

There are obvious physical comparisons that could be made between torture and *thuukkukkaavadi*: pain, suspension, the transgression of bodily boundaries and entrapment, but it is too simplistic to suggest that it is some form of conscious or unconscious masochistic re-experiencing of pain. The vow to propitiate the deity is not undertaken solely as an act of completion or ending, but is created to ensure the continuous protection and safety of the devotee and their community, in the ongoing atmosphere of threat and uncertainty. Before the arrival of the Sri Lankan army to occupy the north, this practice was narrowly confined to particular sectors of the population, but has since increased dramatically spreading to all sectors of the community. In the process it has become transformed from a rarely practiced, individualistic ritual, to one that includes whole communities and that seems to give expression to the unspeakable in a modern context.

In its relationship to penance within Judeo-Christian religious concepts, self-hurting is usually seen as a form of punishment, a way of appeasing guilt or a way of coping with the shame of wrongdoing as it “pacifies the anxiety over an indefinite mechanism of justice waiting to pounce” (Glücklich, 2001:17). Among medieval Catholics it was deemed better to undergo punishment in this life than await the even more severe punishments of purgatory. This is one aspect or dimension, but it does not serve to explain fully the experience of *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees. In order to understand the body in its sacred context, it is firstly important to view how the body generally is experienced within Tamil society.

There is recognition of the changing body at various stages throughout life; the marked passages of bodily and social change are noted and celebrated both domestically and at the Hindu temple and Christian church. From birth to the first tooth cutting ceremony to the final disposal of the body, all are signified not only symbolically but also with corporeal action. The body plays a central role in connecting the self with the cosmic world through fasts and acts of devotion; for example great attention is given to food - not exclusively for nourishment, but also to provide a discipline for the spirit, depending

on the foods consumed. Some foods purify and enable concentrated worship; some are over-activating and overwhelm the senses distracting one from acts of devotion (Duraismamy 1997).

The Bhagaved Gita refers to God as residing in the body: all temple construction is built to reflect the human form with each aspect of the temple corresponding to parts of the body, as well as to the “Yoga centres of consciousness” (Duraismamy 1997:5). For example, the head forms the Sanctum Sanctorum, it points west and contains the most sacred image; the feet lie at the *Rajagopuram* or main entrance and points east. The passages inside the temple around which each devotee circumambulates on arrival at the temple, represents the three body layers: gross, subtle and causal. During the *puja* ceremony various rites conjoin devotee and deity in both a spiritual and physical bond in which the body is a central and integral whole. The *abishekam* ceremony in which the image deity is anointed with *panchamirtham* (honey, ghee, curd, milk and fruit) and adorned in fine clothing, ends with the devotees jostling to receive the food mixture that has covered the deity. Through consumption of the *panchamirtham* the devotee is able to literally imbibe and share the blessed food of the deity. The *sanctum sanctorum* acts as a “volume resonator, the image on the pedestal as an energy reservoir, the worshippers as receivers and the air inside as a medium for the transfer of energy” (Duraismamy 1997:7). The dance steps of Lord Siva, who maintains the cosmos in motion with his 1008 dance positions is learnt by all young Hindu girls as part of their understanding of bodily, spiritual discipline. Also the strenuous genuflection in devotion to Lord Ganesh/Pillaiyar, are all examples of the body incorporated into the devotional life of the Hindu devotee. Both male and female worshippers utilise their bodies in sacred acts of penance (Sanskrit: *tapas*) and devotion, including *kaavadi* (dancing and suspension-style), *pirathattai* (rolling) and *kumpudupora* (women who kneel and walk in steps of three from temple to temple), thereby eloquently expressing and communicating both their suffering and their devotion.

In the eastern region around Batticaloa, Lawrence (1998, 2000) describes how the temple oracles articulate through the Amman deities very explicit and graphic bodily re-enactments concerning the experience of torture as well as the whereabouts of the disappeared, that enables answers to be obtained in this especially complex sphere of loss

and unfinished grief. She suggests that because of the intense trauma of the war period, local Tamils have learnt to “keep quiet” (1998: 271) their mourning of the disappearances occurring in their midst, other than among their closest personal associates, but the oracles are able to provide a way through this silence and trauma. Overcoming the consequences of violence is also a key element in most of the great Hindu dramas of ancient conflicts, with their acts of avengement and ultimate resolution. Ancient battles are re-enacted and played out in many temple grounds throughout the Jaffna peninsula with the rapt attention and emotional complicity of the devotees, as though they are witnessing today’s dilemmas being acted out and resolved: evil vanquished by good. The Christian churches likewise provide not only a place of solace, but also an opportunity to hear bible stories that include battles of good over evil, and many churches contain the plaster body of Christ displaying his sacrificial wounds.

For many the association of pain with religion and sacredness is incomprehensible and even paradoxical, but as Glucklich (2001) shows there is another way of understanding the representation of pain in religion or as he describes it: “religious self-hurting”, which lies in a more positive framework. Glucklich suggests that religious pain creates a bond between devotee and God, as well as others – I presume he means other devotees and practitioners, and reconstructs the notion of injurious wretchedness into a more fully integrated and positive relationship that operates at a deeper level of reality than that of individual existence. By taking a view of religious pain that employs theories from theology, psychology and neurology, he engages less with the social aspects of religious induced pain (although cites the work of anthropologists including Turner, Crapanzano, Csordas, Douglas et al.), choosing instead a neuro-psychodynamic approach. He poses the question as to why rites of passage have to involve “ritualised pain” (p.131) in order to be effective and expands his investigation through a study of cross-cultural perspectives on religious suffering.

Religious self-hurting is known across cultures and societies from early Christian flagellants, Sioux Sun dancers, Muslim Shi’ite sword beaters and African scarification ritual specialists. Glucklich proposes five models of religious self-inflicted pain: juridical, magical, military, athletic and ecstatic. He acknowledges the linearity of this but recognises that more than one model comes into play in any of these settings: flagellants

may derive pleasure from their acts of penance, the American Indian Sun Dancer may be performing an initiation ritual and simultaneously be making a political statement concerning white oppression. Similarly, the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee is performing an act of penance and devotion, as well as a show of strength, liberation, and as a way of expressing his and his communities' entrapment by oppressive dominant political structures.

Studies carried out within Tamil communities in other parts of South Asia, (Brighenti 2003; Fuller-Collins 2001; Wilford 2000) state that ordeals of self-inflicted pain are found exclusively among low-caste and class devotees. In Malaysia social inequalities have been linked to the practice of *thuukkukkaavadi* (Wilford 2000), through notions of stigma and "intra-ethnic othering" by elite Hindu reformists (p13). The practice of certain non-Agamic rituals among the lower class/caste Tamils in Malaysia are seen by high caste Tamils as denigrating to the practice of neo-Hinduism within the already disparaging eyes of the modernist Islamic Malaysian community. This is in explicit contrast to the setting of northern Sri Lanka where devotees come from all ranks and sectors of society. If the impact of the war has altered or transformed the practice of *thuukkukkaavadi*, it could be anticipated that it would *not* be exclusive to the lower castes and classes, because in the north, everyone who remained was affected and suffered to a greater or lesser degree.

Brighenti (2003) links the origins of "self-torture" within theistic religious practice in India to a possible earlier connection with ancient shamanistic rites, suggesting that the infliction of pain on the self marks a passage from profanity to sacredness. The performance of a vow aims to ensure the protection and favour of a chosen deity. By withstanding the pain of the ordeal, devotees also aim to purify their inner self by transcending the barriers of the human condition and reach a state of blissful communion with the deity. Through public demonstration of the toleration of extreme pain the initiate shows bystanders that he is immune to harm – and therefore to be witnessed as under the protection of the divine. Hence the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee is often given a sick child to hold, or asked to touch someone with an illness during his ordeal, in the expectation that his divine status will confer health on the bodies of the sick. Another link connects the devotees to goddesses of epidemics and disease – at least in the past, involving vows

using self-inflicted pain through the insertion of hooks into the flesh, for example the Bhils of western Madhya Pradesh. Here, the rite was called '*gal deora*' ('*gal*' meaning hook) and was performed in March: the month known to be prevalent for diseases (as in northern Sri Lanka).

Among the present day Hindu communities in Bengal, Kerala, Mysore as well as Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa, acts of ritual self-hurting are to be found in a variety of forms and there are certain features that link them. Many of the rituals include oscillation, rotation and flying; for example in the Orissa-Bengal area *Chadak puja* (from the Sanskrit word *chakra*: wheel; Brighenti 2003) devotees attached by rope to a central pole are suspended, then spun in rotation; they throw flowers on to observers below, and evoke the names of Siva, his avatars and the Goddess, which ends the seven day festival in adoration of Lord Siva. The rotational aspect is said to relate to the cycle of life and the renewal of agricultural work cycles. It is also in transcendence of the human, earthly condition (p. 4) through "magic flight" that connects the cosmos with the earth. In Chattisgarh, practitioners climb a sacred ladder and perform acts of scourging from the top in an act of purification; and in parts of Orissa devotees used to insert hooks under their back muscles in a rite entitled *uda parab*. With the arrival of the British in South India many of the hook rites were substituted with less carnal performances in which devotees were placed in a basket and suspended aloft, or a leather strap was tied around the torso and he was thus suspended. In Tamil Nadu, *Kattavaryan* is a local variation on the name of Siva and Parvati's son Murugan – so beloved of the Sri Lankan Tamils and closely connected, along with the Goddess, to *thuukkukaavadi*. It is related that *Kattavaryan* performed an act of self-sacrifice by suspending himself from a hook attached to a sacrificial pole and it is said that following his death through self-immolation, he was finally resurrected as a god.

These practices found throughout the Deccan plateau, confirm a historical and religious connection with the practice of *kaavadi* in Sri Lanka, as well as in northern parts of India. But whereas in India the practice has remained limited to smaller, non-Agamic temples and is said to be popular among lower caste devotees, this is no longer the case in the northern peninsular of Sri Lanka. As stated it has become popular among all castes and its religious motivations have become more complex by its intensification among

members of the community who were imprisoned during the war and who claim less religious motivation or attachment than more main stream devotees.

Ritualised pain is an inherent characteristic of sacrifice. People have referred to the 'sacrifice' of the younger generation in war settings: in northern Sri Lanka this included the use of civilians both as purported human shields, as well as the creation of martyrs for the LTTE. Therefore Tamils can be seen to be sacrificial victims in the context of war; perhaps again *thuukkukkaavadi* is a representation of this, and is inclusive of the community as a whole, who also suffered. But is there also a protective function? According to Girard (1977) sacrificial victims are surrogates for the aggressive impulses of society: their role is to protect society from its own internal violence that threatens to spill out. He takes a Judeo-Christian view that, although utilising examples from the bible and Greek mythology to illustrate his points, also refers to Leinhardt's and Turner's studies of the Dinka and Ndembu tribes respectively, who offer sacrifices of cattle to restore unity among the community, or in the case of Leinhardt, the burial alive of the 'master of the fishing spear'. In terms of *thuukkukkaavadi's* function for the entire community, I would suggest that its role is not only as an act of penance or a vow to the deity, but also used for its articulation of the entrapment that many have, and continue to experience.

There is little protection offered in daily life currently in the north, so according to Girard's theory other resources such as sacrifice are needed to prevent an overspill of aggression – in this instance the sacrificial elements of the gang youths, through their violence and the infliction of bodily pain, fulfil a need on the part of the community. These sacrificial bodies perpetuate cycles of violence that continue with vengeance, counter reprisals and reciprocities of violence: their mimetic quality is perpetuated without end. Girard asserts that communities torn by violence have need of, and must produce a scapegoat. In order to extricate itself from these mimetic cycles of violence, new interpretations and forms of violence must be removed. A scapegoat fulfils this function: to be perceived as responsible for all the violence within the community, this then becomes a reality or a self-fulfilling prophecy (p. 84). At some stage therefore, efforts may be made to remove these scapegoats once they have fulfilled their potential. I was told that most young Tamil males tend to either join a gang, or renounce violence

through the practice of *thuukkukkaavadi*. However, I doubt that it is so clearly delineated as I also heard that some gang members do undertake the ritual, renouncing violence at least for the duration of their preparations. Others mention the 'fun' aspect of *thuukkukkaavadi* as a motivation, suggests that there is a somewhat more ambivalent attitude among some practitioners towards its purely spiritual aspects.

Other potential scapegoats in the future might arise from the large numbers of young women who have joined the LTTE. The majority come from the rural districts with few prospects for marriage or education, due to a dearth of young males and economic hardship. Most grew up within violent and deprived backgrounds, having also lost brothers and fathers in the fighting. They find within the movement some measure of security and, paradoxically maybe safety: there is no requirement or expectation to fend for themselves as they are provided with food, clothing and accommodation; they do not have to worry about marriage as this is generally discouraged within the organisation. They live in an environment in which they are indoctrinated to become courageous, brave, 'independent' and vital to the Tamil cause; with the potential to achieve heroic, honoured status – the first time many have been held in any position of respect. The movement also becomes a surrogate family; the cadre after giving up her own kin supplants them with this other familial group who provides for her needs in terms of sustenance, and even her very reason for existence.

Female cadres are viewed with some measure of fear, respect and authority (a strong incentive probably) outside the movement, and are obeyed without question by men and women civilians alike. They have the freedom to move around outside their village, unlike their non-combatant sisters; they own motorcycles and learn to handle and use weapons, which must give a feeling of strength as well as security and self-protection. These are all powerful inducements and enticements for oppressed and often abused women, albeit with the caveat that if they survive the fighting, they are often held in suspicion and find it difficult to reintegrate, let alone find a marriage partner once they leave the movement. Celibacy is highly regarded and in the early days was enforced among all cadres; ostensibly to placate and win over the conservative Jaffna middle classes, according to Sumathy (2004). Marriage is now permitted providing both parties leave the combat branch of the movement, but outside of marriage sexual liaisons are

taboo. I would also surmise that as containment of disloyalty is such a vital component of the LTTE strategy as well as maintenance of a strong moral stance, any close sexual contacts would undermine their ability to control and dominate. The couple's primary loyalty would inevitably shift to the new partnership with the movement relegated to secondary importance; not only is this incompatible with their moral ethos, but also dangerous in terms of contested loyalties.

These women fighters' bodies have been used in destructive sacrifice to eliminate themselves, their target and anyone in the vicinity; their bodies are disposable even as they are revered through martyrdom. It is said that many female suicide bombers have been victims of rape or assault, leading them to join the Tamil Tigers in the first instance, and secondly to volunteer to be the vehicle for the destruction of others. This renders the female body disposable as a consequence of its violation. A recent female suicide bomber^{lxxi} was suspected of being pregnant at the time of her attack, however, this proved to have been a ruse in order for her to obtain access to the army headquarters in Colombo, via an ante-natal clinic. The notion that this was deemed possible highlighted how many saw the LTTE: that she was considered capable of killing not only herself, but also her unborn child spoke volumes about how Tamils and in particular Tamil Tiger women, have become perceived in the south; as violent and aggressive barbarians. Images created of Tamil Tiger women have encouraged this view: they are portrayed as barely feminine within traditional images of conservative and orthodox Tamil femininity. For example, female cadres wear trousers, shirts with a belt, often have their hair cut short or at least tied up and carry weapons^{lxxii}. They do not wear make-up, jewellery or saris and have learnt to carry their bodies according to both clothing style and the physical training they have received.

The family of a martyr – those who have died heroically in battle or in defence of the movement,^{lxxiii} are given financial support and improved status within their village or neighbourhood. This has created a new social hierarchy in which those who neither have a family member currently in the movement, nor one who has been martyred, are considered at a disadvantage; both status and protection are to be had from having a family member connected to the LTTE, despite its concomitant dangers. Many cadres lose contact with their families when they join up: visits home are rare and always

accompanied by another cadre to check that disinformation detrimental to the movement is not disseminated.

The training of all militant factions, which used to take place abroad but now in the Vanni, initiates the required process of detachment essential in producing dedicated and loyal activists. Their indoctrination employs tactics of withdrawal, segregation and isolation to eliminate any attachment to their former lives. This is combined with rigorous military training initially, but is eventually replaced with further brutalisation and in some cases humiliation and abuse. The brutalisation, isolation and lack of a clear rationale or purpose in the training are also classic methods used in torture sequences that aim to break the will of detainees; examples of this are found in interviews with former internees and torture survivors (Scarry 1985; Feldman 1991; Daniel 1994; Somasundaram 1998). The methodical brutalisation of the training camp inmates turns them into malleable and compliant fighters, able to carry out acts of atrocity in the battlefield - acts that in peace time would be unthinkable. During the cease-fire with no clear aim or target, this type of aggressive reactivity continues inappropriately in response to frustration and anger, and is one of the more devastating consequences of war to be negotiated by communities in the aftermath of war.

Cathartic transformations

In any examination of ritual performance, the concept of “liminality” as introduced by Van Gennep (1909) and developed by Turner (1969: 95-130) is an essential and central aspect. He suggests that a cathartic transformation occurs during ritual performances that enable those involved (individual or community) to re-enter and re-establish their everyday social worlds, following the disrupting event. Turner developed and broadened this theory, progressing from a structural view of socio-cultural existence to the notion of ‘liminoidal communitas’ whereby two antagonistic principles operate within society comprising structure on the one hand and creativity on the other, which are seen to interact and alternate with each other. Within this schema, authority views creativity as polluting and dangerous, resulting in the demarcation of behaviour through prescriptive

rules and regulations. Turner suggests however, that ‘otherness’ inevitably intervenes and it is within this liminal space that rituals can both reveal and contain this otherness. The notion of a “betwixt and between” (p.107) state of liminality that he described, was extended from and included in the work of other social scientists such as Douglas (1966), Gluckman (1963), and Leach (1976).

Van Gennep looked at significant life stages and the rites and ceremonies that are used to mark passage from one stage to another. He found that such passages comprised the major ceremonial events in all socio-cultural settings and that these had a universal structure: separation, transition and incorporation. Douglas (1966) developed these ideas through her work on pollution and purity where dirt was rejected as representing a disordered and chaotic world, asserting that rituals are the only setting in which pollution – a powerful force, could be harnessed through accessing supernatural, cosmological power that could bring a sense of wholeness and completeness.

Practitioners of *thuukkukkaavadi* are seen as having certain powers and connections with the supernatural world of gods and are therefore able to transfer some of their strength and power onto others: it is possible occasionally to see examples of this during which the suspended *thuukkukkaavadibakkthan* is given a child to hold or touch; but this ability only lasts for the duration of his suspension. *Thuukkukkaavadi* marks an important life stage in that it is a transition from ill-health, difficulty or even trauma to a period of peace, calmness as well as a reassertion of control and power. In northern Sri Lankan society, authority has been imposed through military structures aimed at thwarting the creativity, dissension and natural chaos inherent in free thinking and unrestricted action, through constraint and suppression of any inclination to express suffering, let alone protest. The ‘otherness’ of *thuukkukkaavadi* can be said to be an attempt to override this imposition of order: initially through the liberating experience of trance and then the very act of piercing itself, it can be said that a ‘positive pollution’ is enabled that provides a forum for the expression of emotions for the devotee and their community^{lxxiv}.

The north during the mid-1990s was also a period of transition from the period of LTTE control to the army’s occupation, and it was within this atmosphere that *thuukkukkaavadi* spontaneously grew in such huge numbers among those most liminal within society: the

Tamil youths. The body seems to predominate in *kaavadi* and the mind follows, through the trance/ecstatic state of the devotee who lies outside the social, state system of control. Gluckman (1963a) wrote that “social systems are replete with ambivalence: as fields of tension, co-operation and struggle”. Rituals give expression to these tensions through their open, public and regular enactment of conflict, protest and reversed hierarchies that as a result renews and confirms the established order and thereby reduces social and emotional tensions. Turner (1964) also describes rituals as “dynamic moments in social groups’ creative practices wherein symbolic creations adjust to internal or external pressures for change”. Ritual symbols according to Turner, unify the disparate elements that in daily life appear contradictory, resulting in a revitalisation of social classifications through cathartic ritual practice. What adjustment has taken place within the practice of Jaffna healing rituals?

The *rites de passage* as well as the social structure of many communities in northern Sri Lanka, have suffered severe disruption over the last twenty years and as such it is to be expected that this would be reflected in the practice of certain rituals. Individuals and groups in liminal positions are many: ex-soldiers/militants, refugees, the sick, homeless – with the absence of structure one can see “communitas” emerging within the field of ritual practice at least, if not in society at large. Prior to the conflict, criminals underwent *thuukkukkaavadi* as an act of individual atonement following release from imprisonment and likely execution; now it has extended out to encompass a wider section of the population not limited by structures of class or caste.

Citing Turner (1964), Crapanzano (1981) and Gill (1977), Glucklich (2001) suggests that despite their divergent hypotheses there are certain common factors in all three authors claims. He illustrates his point by comparing their disparate views on ‘rites of passage’; for example, rituals both depict and resolve social tensions according to Turner, in the case of the Ndembu by separating the initiate from the world of females in which he has grown and then to integrate him into the community of other males and their incumbent structures of power. Crapanzano offers a different argument and claims that circumcision as practiced in Morocco, is a method of resolving oedipal conflicts by traumatising the boy in order to repress his maternal desires. Gill in his study of Hopi initiation rituals asserts that rituals which involve whipping the initiate by figures he has always assumed

to be Sun Gods, but who are revealed as members of his own family, the community thereby acculturates the initiate into their world of deceit, lies and uncertainty that he must learn to confront and accept as an adult: replacing child-like fantasies with adult realities. What unites these three disparate views of rites of passage according to Glucklich, is that each involves graphic acts of systematic violence which incorporate changes in social status and identity by linking pain with the symbolic enactment of the ritual with the transformation of selfhood. Eliade (1958) describing an initiation rite of the Maudan - a Native American tribe of Dakota, refers to it as “initiatorial death” (p.xii). He describes it as an encounter with the sacred that symbolises the death of the novice and his consequent return to the living, revitalised with a new, adult identity that signifies the end of a state of profanity, childhood and ignorance. Littlewood (2004) describes the “mourning” rituals of the Shouter Baptists in Trinidad, whereby initiates are bound and isolated for between 3 and 7 days during which visions of a biblical self are communicated through the Baptist Mother. This is not a ‘mourning’ state as such, but denotes a state of temporary death, whilst being closely attached to the earth, and “enabling the spirit to live more fully in the other world” (p.101).

The devotees perform extreme body rites, similar to *thuukkukkaavadi*, whereby the flesh is pierced with hooks and ropes are attached to straps that hoist the initiate into the air. Eliade sees these rituals not only in terms of rebirth but also as a regeneration from the profane to the sacred, which I would surmise has more relevance for the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotee; these are not initiation rites in their truest sense but, transcendence from a life of trauma and torment to one of sacredness. Unanimously, all the devotees I spoke to referred to their feelings of peace (*amaithi*), calmness, power and a sense of new beginning; of undertaking a trial of devotion or challenge, becoming transformed and then emerging renewed - again Van Gennep and Turner’s theories of rites of passage apply here.

One of the main opponents to the idea of sacred pain and its spiritual groundings is Konrad Lorenz (1963), who saw initiation rites as belonging to man’s biological drives, expressing an inborn aggression. He believes this aggression is focused towards the young by adult males who are threatened by them as sexual competitors; he argues that this fits with man’s innate aggressiveness in relation to “mating, territory, and feeding”

(Glucklich 2001:131). This is not applicable in the case of *thuukkukkaavadi* because there is no expectation to perform this ritual by the community or other adult males, and there is no routine rite of passage that every male in the village must undertake – each person chooses to do this; it is not a compulsory ceremony. Some comradely goading does exist towards those who have already voiced their intention, for example among the devotees peer group of friends and others of similar age and sex, or those who have themselves performed the ritual. By contrast close family are often apprehensive of the extremity of the vow and women express their distress openly. One devotee spoke of being alert (rather than in trance) to what was going on around him whilst suspended aloft. He was able to watch those below him on the ground – many of whom were visibly upset, in a state of detached curiosity. This recalls Scheff's (1977) concept of 'double vision' in acts of catharsis (p. 488), during which one is both the participant and detached observer of emotion: both one's own and those of others present at the scene. Examining the work of both Breuer and Freud who introduced the notion of catharsis through talking about trauma as an important aspect of recovery, Scheff suggests that it was the re-experiencing of emotion that was crucial. He contends that Freud seems to have missed the significance of the experience of emotion, citing his case study of Mathilde H. Freud mentions briefly that she 'cried away' her trauma, without the apparent need to articulate it verbally in order to resolve it; the act of re-experiencing the emotion itself was sufficient. However, both he and Scheff seem unable to entirely dispense with the idea of talking or verbalizing as an essential component of catharsis and/or recovery. In contrast I would assert that catharsis takes place without any need for verbal articulation among devotees, because embodied action/performance already exists within known and accepted practices of devotion to the Hindu god, Murugan and other deities.

Scheff discusses 'distanced *recurrence*' (p. 485, author's italics), which he equates with a drama where what the audience sees is an approximation of their own experience: an experience from the past that is triggered by an event in the present. This may explain the importance of the *thuukkukkaavadi* ritual for those watching who often appear in more distress than the devotees themselves.

The Sun Dance, encountered in many Native American groups, has many other parallels with the ritual of *thuukkukkaavadi* – not only in its techniques, but more importantly in its

motivations. The Sun Dance is carried out as a redemptive ritual aimed at resolving the Native Americans' conflict with white society and, as an act of defiance it mourns the loss of dead tribesmen through a re-enactment of capture, torture and release (Glücklich 2001). The experience of many devotees of *thuukkukkaavadi* corresponds with this aspect of ritual motivation in its mourning of lost kin and 'tribe'; an act of defiance against forces that would ensnare, constrain and wound. In the Sun Dance, initiates or their clansmen must offer something – a gift, for their release from the ropes: in *thuukkukkaavadi*, release from the hooks is gained at the temple where an offering or gift of coconut is made – the smashing of which is an act of purification. The *darshana* of and by the deity releases the devotee in a symbolic act of capture and release, but not until the breaking of the fast does the devotee free himself entirely, to be released back into society and ordinary time (Verthiville Belle 2000). *Thuukkukkaavadi* devotees, as with Sun Dancers, concede the pain but also acknowledge the greater experience of challenge, empowerment and the release of energy as well as communion with the God/Creator. Pain as an instrument of passage is a part of the transition from one state of being to another, for example circumcision, child birth, scarification is part of the rite of passage from childhood to man/womanhood and becomes an indicator of transition from one state to another. Rappaport (1999) makes the point that transformations that take place during rituals involving physical change, are not in themselves significant; it is the meaning it imbibes that has importance.

Daniel (1984) describes the pilgrimage journey he undertook to *Subra Malai* in Kerala, a pilgrimage in honour of *Ayyappan*, son of Siva. The pilgrimage journey is undertaken barefoot over many kilometres of rough terrain, often in the broiling heat and humidity of a South Indian December or January. It is an exclusively male practise and has become a well-known pilgrimage throughout Sri Lanka and India, as well as among the Tamil diaspora. Devotees commit various other austerities apart from walking barefoot: celibacy, fasting, eating no meat, sleeping on the hard ground and carrying their ritual sacraments (coconuts, rice) on their heads. Daniel describes how the pilgrimage combines personal embodied experiences with spiritual elements – unification with *Ayyappan* comes through the bodily experience of pain. The intensity of devotion or *bhakti* towards *Ayyappan* overcomes the physical agony of the journey: the

transformation of pain into divine love. The most senior and respected organiser of *thuukkukkaavadi* in Jaffna is also a devotee and makes a yearly pilgrimage to the site where he places a golden crown that he designed and had made from gold, in the temple in honour of *Ayyappan*.

Paravasam: Trance

The phenomenon of *paravasam* (trance or state of ecstasy) is of interest in relation to *thuukkukkaavadi* for several reasons. For example there is often an assumption that all participants of *thuukkukkaavadi* are in a state of trance; I was surprised to discover that many devotees are not at any stage. Others were in a trance state at different times during the ritual – some at the beginning when the hooks were inserted, others afterwards when they were dancing/flying or later upon entering the temple. Many were alert to their surroundings and the people around them. There was also the difference between degrees of trance; some experienced a ‘little’ trance or a ‘half’ trance and others ‘full’ trance in which they were unable to remember anything about what had occurred or who had been present. What factors induced greater or lesser trance states? Was there any relationship between circumstances of vows, previous experiences?

One aspect of trance that many anthropologists have referred to is the element of enabling: allowance and permission is granted to express otherwise inexpressible or taboo subjects or feelings - was this another way for people to show anger, protest, dissent without fear of retribution or punishment? For example, Lewis (1971) suggests that trance states are a re-enactment of problems and dilemmas using symbolic dramatisation. It has been suggested that trance states often enable anger to be expressed which is otherwise repressed and disallowed; particularly within patriarchal societies (Obeyesekere 1981). Boddy (1988) describes spirit possessions among the Muslim women of Hofriyat in Northern Sudan, as not only concerned with problems but also with “identity and selfhood”.

The world of Hofriyat women is one of enclosure, both in terms of living spaces and their own self-perceptions as women who have undergone female circumcision. Through

trance and possession, not only is insight into the self achieved, but it is also a performance that resonates for the observers as well as the possessed, providing the opportunity for each observer to relate her own past experiences and current concerns to the possession event – much like group psychotherapy. Boddy states that these performances are viewed as completely real “(And) what she sees is someone at once essential to her own construction of self and a symbol of it, who is also her own sheer antithesis” (p. 415), and it is this paradox that allows her the freedom to explore concepts of self and grow in self awareness. This in turn frees Hofriyat women from “the fetters of hegemonic cultural constructs”.

Kapferer (1983) describes trance in relation to dance as its “structural analogue” (p. 270). He points out that the production of trance within dance performance occurs through the limiting of perception by and of the self, as distant object. *Aathumkkaavadi* (dancing *kaavadi*) practitioners more than *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees seem to be more inclined to trance states, possibly because the dancers are ‘in’ the music more than the suspended devotees. It was notable that those *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees who did claim to be in a trance state, identified music as a key source and element of the experience, whereas those who did not enter a trance state were less inclined to remark on the presence of music. More common among a number of *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees was the trance state induced *prior* to suspension, during the dance between devotee and partner (see photo 13, p. 265). After two of the hooks have been inserted it is common to see the devotee and his chosen partner take part in a shared dance that seems to incite a heightened state in the one who is to be suspended, and is lead, controlled, guided and restrained where necessary, by the other. This partner is carefully selected beforehand for his trustworthiness.

Bourguignon (1973) asserts that trance states are “self-serving and self-enhancing”; suggesting a certain deception is involved in trance and that there is a deliberate dishonesty at play to fulfil individual need rather than social integration. She does however go on to assert that whilst they may be serving the interests of that person individually, there is also an important social function that enables expression of protest and dissent concerning the inhibiting agents, such as male domination and other forms of social hierarchies. As both Lewis and Obeyesekere say, possession trances can be seen as

a reaction to hierarchies of power and control for those marginalised within society – mostly women, and those under threat or the powerless generally: it provides a way of expressing inhibitions, produced through hierarchies of social status. I witnessed a woman who was in a deep *naga* (snake) trance who approached an onlooker and slapped him hard around the face: there was no reaction, no constraint and no disapproval; it appeared to be accommodated within the ceremonial space by all present, including the man who had been hit. It was remarked that this woman had a reputation as a genuine and legitimate conduit for her particular deity – the *naga* (snake).

The Tamil word for trance is *paravasam* meaning great joy or ecstasy, but also in these instances *arul* is sometimes used to denote a state that is incurred within a sacred, religious context and is part of an act of worship, a festival celebration or a pilgrimage (Fuller Collins 1997: 114). Perhaps the strongest link between *kaavadi* and possession trances in other settings can be seen amongst women in trance states as described by Skultans (1987). In Maharashtra, among the Mahanubhav sect, she illustrates how healing comes about through the pain and suffering of women in trance. Rather than offering “luxuries” and other placatory gestures, these women take on the strenuous and even dangerous task of inviting possession by the *bhut bhada* (bad spirits), thereby effecting a cure for afflicted family members – most of whom are suffering some form of mental distress. It is women’s strength, and not their inherent weakness - as suggested by some of the temple priests, that enables these women to do battle with the spirits through trance, and arrest their malevolence away from a family member and onto herself. In order to fight them she must perform violent bodily contortions, bathe and drink contaminated river water and in some cases according to Skultans, lose her life in the process through acts of extreme self-sacrifice. In a similar way, I would contend that the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees are also taking on the iniquity that has been visited on them, their families, and their village throughout the war; including imprisonment, which must have seemed like a visitation by evil.



Photo 13 . Trance dancers

Chapter 9

War with impunity

The sound of chanting begins in the far distance, breaking the stillness and the darkness as the first *pirathattai* devotees begin arriving; rolling around the temple with hands held clasped above their heads, bodies covered in the sandy soil. Their voices sound exhausted, jolted by each turn as their cries of “*arohara!*” followed by the sacred names of Murugan, Siva, Murugan’s wives and “*vel, vel vertri vel*” are called out. Occasionally a lone *pirathattai* devotee lies sunk in exhausted sleep in the sand, his hands still clasped, until gently nudged into life and movement again by a sympathetic passer-by. Rapidly the numbers of devotees increase as dawn breaks and those who have travelled through the night along distant roads and lanes, start arriving. The sound of chanting becomes louder and infinite, making it more difficult to differentiate individual words. The now steady stream is joined by men and women walking swiftly and purposely towards the temple in order to ensure a place that will afford them a close view both of and by, the deity.

Much later after the main ceremonies have taken place within the temple, the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees begin arriving, the brilliant colours and loud music heralding their arrival, appearing like tall ships being tossed gently on an ocean of people, the devotee gently swaying in a circular motion; up, back, down, forward and up again. The tractor behind them is full of women, children and other supporters, as well as those who have walked the long distance from the village. The stream gradually becomes a steady flow as many continue to appear over the next few hours, arriving at their final destination. Those wandering around the temple grounds have to hurriedly clear space for the hundreds of *pirathattai* devotees; women performing *kumbudupora*; small groups of *aathumkkaavadi* devotees dancing to the potent accompaniment of drumming, and the *nadeswara* pipes.



Photo 14. *Thondamanaaru* temple festival: *theetham* ceremony.

Women with their burning pots of camphor atop a crown of margosa leaves look exhausted from their long walk in the heat. Rising up in their midst are the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees, dominating the space, but also part of it. With the intense midday heat, the air is filled with the smell of burning camphor and the sand is sticky under foot from the broken shards of coconut shells that litter the ground. Hundreds of people are now milling around the temple precincts performing their own small acts of devotion, washing their feet before entering the temple, breaking coconuts, giving *darshan* to Pillaiyar or Amman nearby, lighting camphor, or carrying small baskets of fruit in their hands ready to give to the *kurrukkal* inside who will bring it to the *swami* with their names for special dedication. Outside the Vairavar temple at the foot of the main temple complex, a small group of *bhajan* singers and musicians sit, and in front of them a couple of women in deep trance dance like cobras, while another man in female attire and make-up, also dances entranced before running out into the crowd looking distressed; a large crowd have gathered and watch with serious expressions. The general atmosphere is one of devotion mixed with an atmosphere of a market: peanuts and popcorn sellers; trinket and metal cooking ware stalls are lined up along the street. The LTTE have their own stalls selling cooking oil and fresh produce from the Vanni. Occasionally a group of younger men walk defiantly through with linked arms as is Jaffna custom, laughing and boisterous, sometimes making derogatory or inappropriate comments mostly towards other young women as they move on through the crowds at some speed. So proceeds the annual Lord Murugan festival, where thousands of devotees come to pay homage - devotions that are re-enacted at numerous temples across the peninsula each year. All have endured in some form or another the violence, loss and upheaval of the last twenty-five years and many are taking this opportunity to fulfil vows and penances (*tapas*) to their Gods and Goddesses for their survival. Also in the hope of ensuring further protection in the difficult months and years of uncertainty that lie ahead. Despite an overwhelming need for unity, peace and progress, it remains remote from most people's daily reality. Instead, since starting this thesis there has been a rapid increase in violence committed against ordinary civilians, with daily violations of the Cease-fire Agreement (CFA) and thousands of deaths. The talk is once again of war. Tamil lives will again be placed in jeopardy, this time with intimate knowledge of the

devastation to come. Their Tamil identity will once more be directly called into question as daily cordon-and-search operations, arrests, and harassment re-emerges. They must face the likelihood not only of disruptions to work and school, but also of displacement and flight as their fields of safety narrows, and of course the terror of possible imprisonment and interrogation. The threat, as well as the reality of bombing, checkpoints, humiliation and fear will appear after four years of silent tension, where periods of optimism have been interspersed with consistently dashed hopes. Powerless to influence the main players in this swelling violence, they must once again await the outcome of their fate in an atmosphere where the insurgents talk of a 'final war' as the only means of achieving autonomy in a confrontation with an intransigent and negligent government.

This thesis attempts to interlink two major themes. The first relates to contested identities and the subjugation of the Tamils. Successive waves of hegemonism with its roots in western imperialism, have established the conditions in which the present conflict in Sri Lanka could develop and take hold. Externally imposed structures of governance have done everything except unify the nation; instead enabling concepts of 'difference' and 'otherness' to grow. Partiality in politics ensured that divisions continued and solutions to increasing economic demands were addressed unsatisfactorily against rapid population growth where stress was placed on the economy through the demand for jobs, especially among the newly educated rural classes. Questions concerning identity and the constituents of 'nation' and 'the state' became cause for disagreement. Unresolved differences lead to major unrest, and the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983 left trust between the two communities in tatters. Tamil separatist movements evolved in the aftermath of these attacks and the impotence of both Tamil and Sinhalese politicians to address their concerns ensured increasing isolation, and enabled a fertile breeding ground for dissent and increasing militancy. The ensuing war lead to devastating losses for both the Tamils and Sinhalese, and a need to express this suffering arose exponentially in the difficult climate of the occupation of the Jaffna peninsula by the government's army in 1996 up to the present day.

The second theme examines survival. By firmly placing authority within a local context, I have attempted to show what elements have enabled the Tamils to endure the violence of

the last twenty-five years. Language is often inadequate to fulfil this task for reasons related to fear, tyranny and the sheer enormity of the losses. Within this beleaguered community, recognised capacities and resources have been used to overcome and express some of the suffering and loss through familiar but redefined, embodied and ritualised performative acts. This has been articulated most forcefully through the youth population, who express for everyone the horrors of war, oppression, and confinement. New modes of performativity, both in ritual performance and adherence to gang traditions have sought to provide a space in which these young Tamils can find some autonomy and potency. Both the refractory youths who cause so much concern, and the devotees undertaking *thuukkukkaavadi* in huge numbers articulate the violence and brutality of the Tamil experience over the last twenty-five years, and are not to be silenced easily.

Repercussions

Epistemological studies from within the field of medical anthropology have contributed to debates on the socio-cultural, political and economic effects of war on human societies, and identified its frequently negative impact on health; this also includes recovery in the aftermath of war (Allen 1998; Kakar 1990, Kapferer 1988, Lan 1985, Last 2000, Littlewood 2001, Obeyesekere 1993, Perera S. 2001, Lawrence 1998, 2000). In extension of this, I have sought to provide a perspective on what occurs within the uncertain spaces of a fragile cease-fire, where the certainties of post-war rebuilding and recovery are absent. Reflecting instead on how these ambiguities are managed, I have attempted to highlight the importance of recognising the limiting notion of a clearly delineated and neatly defined time-line where conflict ends and healing commences. Healing is of course a desired outcome, but one that remains illusive for many civilians in supposedly 'post-war' societies.

The repercussions of war reverberate across generations - as seen amongst Holocaust survivors where the effects of their experiences have taken years to become fully realised, even amongst second and third generation families (Suarez-Orozco and Robben, 2000). Understanding the uncertainties of 'post-conflict' (seldom a clear concept) societies and

the dilemmas they face is essential when there are so many burgeoning conflicts affecting civilian populations around the world. The more contentious notion that suggests a propensity and predisposition towards violence as a result of childhood abuse, have dire consequences in the context of long-term wars such as that in Sri Lanka, where children are born into conflict. A habituation to violence makes the perpetuation of further atrocities ever more conceivable and justifiable to the protagonists and instigators of war, as well as those brutalised by its impact. Attempts at resolving conflict peaceably seem outside the will of many world governments and their insurgent forces, as they continue to actively build weapons and other means of warfare with little regard for the safety of ordinary citizens who must bear the brunt of their actions. Global trade and investment in the manufacture and sale of war machinery and its related products, has grown and has implications for efforts to end conflict. The loss of lucrative trading opportunities is balanced against the lives and suffering of people living in countries with often unstable or autocratic, militaristic political regimes who are struggling to compete economically with foreign markets and dependent on foreign (western-northern) business investment (Nordstrom, 2004).

In post-colonial Sri Lanka, the neglectful policies of a divisive government were posited against a largely passive Tamil western-educated elite, leading to a situation in which internecine war was the inevitable outcome. Only through deconstruction of the Tamil 'minority other' status can there be progress in resolving the seemingly endless cycles of violence that continue to threaten the lives of all citizens of Sri Lanka. Internecine conflicts pose greater concerns for the protagonists regarding loyalty and betrayal than wars with an external enemy where allegiances are relatively uncontested or at least distanced. The subsequent upheaval and terror of these wars instigate changes in social behaviour that is long lasting, if not permanent for some members of the society. Through the loss of security distrust prevails and violence becomes a familiar reaction to continuous threat. These societies must cope with economic, political and social losses, as well as disrupted and broken family networks within an atmosphere where weapons are easily obtainable. Those, whose position in society still reflects one of combat rather than peace, then use them to vent the anger and frustration of years of pointless violence. In order to "live, survive and cope" (Das and Kleinman 2001) therefore, a means of

dealing with the consequences of such violence is essential. Language is often unfeasible due to the tyranny of political and state manifestations of power, so the body's ability to overcome silence and convey a 'meta-message' is both relevant and crucial.

Powerfully invoked images of passive suffering imply notions of gullibility towards western theories and methods, and should be challenged. Instead, acknowledgement that power and agency lies among those with direct experience of conflict and the continuing challenges that permeate every day life are therefore important. Locating authority as embedded within local systems and forms of practice provides a critique regarding who possesses knowledge and expertise in addressing the concerns of people who are living in societies dealing with the aftermath of violence. These practices may not conform to what are considered typical strategies of 'recovery' however. Concomitantly, these local forms are not necessarily static in the sense of 'ancient' or 'traditional' concepts, but instead are reactive, transformative, and actively engaged across a wide spectrum of current dilemmas.

By re-situating the body as an active agent of redemptive intent, violence can be transformative. The body becomes a central, productive and in some instances cathartic element that seeks to redress some of the violence perpetrated against the person. By re-contextualising encounters of extreme violence in the form of performances that utilise pain – and apply meaning at a personal and in some instances spiritual level – it is possible to re-classify traumatic experiences and emerge having regained a measure of empowerment. This certainly seems to apply to the *thuukkukkaavadi* devotees, but what of the gang members? They also undoubtedly have a serious message to convey, but it remains uncertain as to whether they also achieve any feeling of empowerment through their aggressive re-enactments. Personal freedom to live without fear and threat, to be heard within the political process, and economic support in the form of work opportunities are all crucial, but unresolved factors for many young Tamils.

After the plane lands in a large, open and empty field of sparse vegetation and deep red soil, the passengers are directed by Sri Lankan Army soldiers to a waiting area: an open sided, seated section of ground with a corrugated iron roof to protect against the searing heat. There is very little conversation among the passengers who are composed almost entirely of Sri Lankan Tamils many of whom are returning to the north for the first time

since the fragile cease-fire began. A couple of INGO workers returning after a brief sojourn in the southern capital, are met by colleagues and driven away in their own vehicles, distinguished by insignia flags and logos. After two hours or so, the rest of the passengers pile onto the bus; many loaded down with TVs, stereos, domestic appliances and other items for their relatives, most of which are locally unobtainable. On arrival in the town, the passengers are greeted by numerous taxi drivers vying for custom; some having to hot-wire their ancient Austin Cambridges, the ignition keys having disappeared long ago, others attempting to pile huge boxes and cases into the small confined space of a three wheeled auto. The passengers quickly vanish to their awaiting relatives, to villages long unseen, where they will recount the events of the last years of hardship, loss and change. This scene, which has recurred thousands of times over the last four years, is threatened, and may soon represent a snap shot of a time before opportunities were squandered, and lives became so easily sacrificed. As the war looms ever larger on the horizon, these all too brief meetings will be memories, rather than opportunities to build towards greater tolerance and understanding.

Endnotes

ⁱ 'Tamil' here denotes Ilam Thamils i.e Tamil people from Sri Lanka, and their language. 'Ilam' is both the ancient and modern Tamil word for the island also known respectively as Lanka, Sri Lanka, and Ilankai.

ⁱⁱ Jaffna denotes both the peninsula and main town, which is also known as Yaalppaanam.

ⁱⁱⁱ A cease-fire was brokered between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Feb. 2002. Talks broke down in April 2003, since when there have been many acts of hostility on both sides, making a mockery of the agreement. The term 'post-war' in its strictest sense, is therefore not applicable in a context where violence is taking place on a daily basis in the north and east.

^{iv} Subtler forms of institutional violence relating to outsider status and caste conflicts are explored in later chapters.

^v 'Informant' is an unusable term in this context where notions of spying and informing have negative connotations. 'Interlocutor' is a conglomerative term used here to denote friends, acquaintances, informal and formal contacts and any others who were willing to talk and assist my understanding. However subsequently, I have used a variety of terms to reflect the differing relationships and in order to avoid narrow distinctions and classifications.

^{vi} *Cetil utsavam* literally means 'religious festival of the hooks', but it is known locally as *thuukkukkaavadi* or *paravaikkaavadi*.

^{vii} Michael Roberts (1997) states that there are clearly limits to the power and influence of the colonisers – they also are affected by the ideas and thinking of those they have sought to dominate.

^{viii} *Kassippu* was a local alcoholic brew that contained often lethal amounts of chemicals, said to rot the liver quicker than other types of alcohol, but was cheap and easily obtainable.

^{ix} Prior to the war most families slept outside on the veranda: women sleeping nearest the house door and the men on the outer edge. This became unsafe during the army occupation time and it continues to be so, with increased rates of crime.

^x 'Healer' is untranslatable in Tamil; there is no collective term; each person is usually described according to the specific methods they use: i.e palm readers, astrologists, oracles etc. I therefore use it guardedly and only when I wish to describe the variety of assistance available.

^{xi} This has been a topic of disagreement between the LTTE and rival political groups such as the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), who deny the truth of these claims and have accused the LTTE of fear-mongering in order to maintain their tight grip on the Tamil psyche, serving only to isolate them further.

^{xii} There are various branches of the LTTE: the Sea Tigers are the naval branch; the Black Tigers are the suicide squad. The female Tigers are referred to as 'Birds of Freedom'.

^{xiii} All was not entirely ecologically healthy even before the war – there was generalised, but relatively mild pollution in the region; some salination of water and soil, and overpopulation was becoming a problem.

^{xiv} Tambiah (1986) suggests that the development and success of the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists in the 1970s, arose from their significant role in laying claim to the concept of the 'Aryan Sinhalese' as rightful claimants over land and politics, thereby appealing to the mass of the urban, educated, rootless poor. He

contends that this comes from a sense of inferiority on the part of the Sinhalese in relation to their larger and more powerful neighbour to the north – India.

^{xv} The Karaiya caste are well known for fishing, smuggling and the area around VVT has a reputation for raising tough, hardy individuals e.g Prabhakaran, leader of the LTTE.

^{xvi} The IRA who fairly routinely claimed responsibility as part of their strategy, would also give warnings of bombing campaigns before they took place.

^{xvii} Many were assassinated on suspicion of betrayal and spying; opinion suggesting that they were eliminated to preserve and protect the anonymity of their leader.

^{xviii} A 'shadow war' has become defined locally in Sri Lanka as an officially unrecognised state of warfare, where the level of violence is to such a degree that it can only be described as war.

^{xix} Many Tamils argue for some form of decentralisation that would allow them greater autonomy, but this has so far been unsuccessful with condemnation of the idea by the JVP and the newly formed Buddhist party: the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU).

^{xx} The Tamil 'homeland' reaches from Mannar district in the far northwest, across the northern Jaffna peninsula and down the eastern seaboard as far as the Amparai district.

^{xxi} Some have claimed that caste no longer has the same status as pre-war. This is true to some extent, but it still exerts significant influence. It has changed its position and become more covert, but still with the power to affect social, political and educational opportunities.

^{xxii} Examining records and writings from before the war, it becomes apparent that many people saw their identity linked to economic success that brought self-assurance and confidence.

^{xxiii} In the Aryan tradition of Saivite worship, ritual practices are carried out according to strictly adhered to Brahmanic, Sanskritic laws and texts. Non-agamic worship is recognised as more akin to folk traditions whereby the deity is worshipped directly without the employ of a Brahman priest or other Sanskritic texts and are more popular in the villages.

^{xxiv} This is mirrored by the Hill Country Tamils (Daniel, 1996), who view their identity locally first and foremost, before either 'Sri Lankan' or 'Indian' identities. They have contested identities as 'Estate Tamils' or 'Indian Tamils': both currently considered derogatory terms.

^{xxv} The development was a hydro-electric and irrigation system that despite its proposed economic benefits, actually increased tensions between resident Tamils and resettled Sinhalese labourers brought in to the north-east to work on the project. Corruption and the ever widening divide between rich and poor have also been blamed for increasing the problems (Richardson, 2004).

^{xxvi} One of the key deities *Skanda*, is an important figure in both Hindu and Buddhist worship, known by his other names: *Muruga/Kanthen/Kumara*.

^{xxvii} Village or *uur*, has meaning beyond mere structure; it denotes a physical and spiritual connection that also relates to ancestry and the local deities. See Daniels (1984) for a detailed analysis.

^{xxviii} Its characteristic feature was a vocationally based caste system; although this was gradually being eroded even before the war into what Sivathamby describes as, a "mega-caste" (1995:20) due to the dissolution of many caste occupations which then became absorbed into the high *Vellala* caste and the *Karaiyar* fishing caste. Even here there are anomalies; the *Karaiya* are considered high caste in some sub-regions and low in others.

^{xxix} The *dhobi* or *vanaan* who washes the family's laundry, also acquired this knowledge having seen signs of the first menstrual blood and would be consulted in a more informal sense.

^{xxx} Wexler-Morrison (2004) describes how economic prosperity for some families where the wife works abroad is not necessarily advantageous; there are reports of marital stress and increases in alcoholism among these families.

^{xxxi} There are currently only two government run "Elders' Homes" on the whole peninsula, but demand is increasing.

^{xxxii} Divorce and separation have increased over the postwar period.

^{xxxiii} By giving English lessons to a group of thirty students, predominantly women, as well as spending time with other small groups and individual women, gave me ample opportunities to talk about their lives. Visiting projects in the community often entailed meeting and speaking to the women, and of course both families I lived with, comprised mothers, wives and daughter with whom I would spend most of my time.

^{xxxiv} This does not only relate to physical indoor/outdoor, or internal/external space, but to the people: one would not appear in front of non-family members dressed in 'at home' clothes – see next paragraph in text.

^{xxxv} Many women have had to sell their gold to pay for sons to go abroad, or have buried it in case of future emergencies. Widows used to change into a white sari, have their *Thaali* (gold wedding necklace) removed and gold bangles broken following the death of their husband – a practice seldom seen now.

^{xxxvi} This is usually parents, grandparents or children. Regular *pujas* are held in the home to honour the deceased person on the anniversary of their death each year; a priest usually officiates and close members and friends of the family attend.

^{xxxvii} The Hindu calendar differs from the Gregorian: it is based on the movement of the Sun and its crossing through the twelve signs of the zodiac and the Moon and Jupiter, marking the yearly cycle. For a more in depth analysis of Hindu calendrical and astrological time see Perinbanayagam (1982). Clock time is also on two time scales; 'new time' and 'old time': new time is half an hour later than old and was introduced by the president as an economic measure; it orders all of civic life, but religious, ceremonial time maintains the old system.

^{xxxviii} 'Compatibility' relates to readings of the couples' astrological charts: their star signs, planetary position, auspicious dates and times are examined. Total compatibility is not required, but as many suitable signs as possible, according to the advice of the astrologer. Some unscrupulous astrologers will, for a fee, give false information to support the marriage proposal thus creating a fake compatibility. For example, age: one marriage partner may be older than stated, or planet positions rearranged to ensure suitability. The reverse is also true; if one person does not wish to marry for any reason, the astrological charts will be made to show an incompatibility, thus avoiding personal rejection.

^{xxxix} These laws prescribe a code of conduct that must be adhered to in order to attain full human potential. This also extends to the social level of village and community life and relates to how art, astrology, architecture, medicine and "all matters required to lead ...an effective and holistic existence" are practiced (Priya 2004:3).

^{xl} It is not only Hindu temples that have an annual festival: the Catholic churches also celebrate very similar religious festivals in which the saints are worshipped and venerated over several days of devotion; reflecting in some aspects their connection with Hinduism (see fig 2).

^{xli} St Anthony is a very popular figure in the north, favoured by fishermen, sailors, watermen and the oppressed. He was a popular saint among the Portuguese who are known to be particularly devoted to him.

^{xlii} See Qadri Ismail (1995) for a more detailed analysis of constructs of Muslim identity and the role of self-representation in the Sri Lankan conflict. He argues against ontological categories that seek to define ethnicity as “natural” (p. 56) rather than complex and conflicting.

^{xliii} Also known as *Kannaki*, *Pattini*, *Maadha*, *Mutumari* (Perinbanayagam 1982:42)

^{xliv} ‘Hot’ diseases are associated with the female principle of energy, movement and *Shakthi* (power), whereas the male principle is associated with ‘coolness’ and form. (Mc Gilvray 1982)

^{xlvi} The intention is that they will all be covered eventually; to this end local businessmen are often required to make financial contributions towards these tombstones.

^{xlvi} This also leads one to question what the outcome will be if their demands continue to be unmet as according to Dein and Littlewood, mass suicide or destruction often follows. The LTTE have already spoken during recruitment drives of a ‘final’ war for Eelam.

^{xlvii} Gunatilleke (1998) connects the self-immolation of the Black Tigers with similar practices of the ancient Dravidians when faced with destruction. Trawick (2002) refers to the “self-sacrifice” of both militants and government in destroying the Tamil people, albeit through differing motivations. Religious terms and concepts, although often denied, are frequently applied to the war in Sri Lanka and to its main protagonists. Prabhakaran refers to the ‘*punita ilatciyam*’ – holy aim, of the Tamil struggle (Schalk, 1997:2). Hoole et al (1990), have described the relationship between the LTTE and the civilian population as akin to a “political religion” that “provided for its devotees the emotional excitement of a blood sacrifice” (p.100).

^{xlviii} Unusually, Thileepan left his body to be embalmed and preserved for use by anatomy students at Jaffna University, where it can be viewed in its glass case. This confirms the LTTE position of the martyred bodies’ secularity, but is confusing in its relation to the religious overtones of an imagined heaven.

^{xlix} As Obeyesekere rightly points out (1984), such racial categorisations no longer have a place in citing the origins of either Tamils or Sinhalese. (See Tambiah p.184)

ⁱ High-caste agriculturalists, comprising approximately 50% of the population on the Jaffna peninsula.

^{li} Women and children are considered particular prey to evil through their ‘weakness’ (Ayyar, 1998: 28), and are often given *margosa* to secrete about their person before journeys.

^{lii} A few shopping trips into Jaffna with one of the daughters alerted me to this discomfort; I received constant attention and therefore so did she with questions as to my origins and identity. This was less of a problem for the second family, who seemed to manage having a foreigner in their midst.

^{liii} There is the likelihood that the LTTE would be not be able to exist or keep its grip on the populace in peace time or within a system of power sharing, instead they would have to maintain total power and control over the north and east. The southern political elites would also struggle to maintain power, as their economy would suffer without the trade in warfare and their practices would be open to greater scrutiny, without the distraction of war.

^{liv} Obeyesekere (1978) writing about the rise of ‘*bhakti*’ religiosity in Katharagama in south Sri Lanka, describes certain ritual acts including *kaavadi*, that give vent to the sexual repression that finds itself in a society with a rapid population growth, lack of spouses and an increasingly long period of bachelorhood. He suggests the practice of *kaavadi* provides an outlet for sexual tension and relates the ecstatic devotion of worshippers to Lord Murugan in his incarnation of divine beauty, virility (he has two wives) and youthfulness. This is clearly borne out in Jaffna where changes to marriage customs due to the war, have meant that a great many men are staying single for longer having to await the betrothal of their sisters. Lord

Murugan is recognised and adored in this youthful aspect, rather than his warriorlike incarnation, as Skanda.

^{lv} A recent purported civilian group has emerged calling itself the 'Pongi Elum Makkal Padai' (Unsurging People's Force). They are widely suspected to be a branch of the LTTE; despite their public claims to have no jurisdiction or influence over them. They have engaged in various attacks against army personnel and installations in Jaffna.

^{lvi} Rarely do the LTTE use the personal pronoun 'we' in their public pronouncements, instead they ascribe all their actions to the dictates of the 'Tamil people'. This distances themselves from any perception of hegemony and even culpability at times; ensuring an image of cohesion and to some extent, subservience to their people.

^{lvii} Trawick (2002), in attempting to understand how Sri Lankans as peace-loving people, have been incited to alter their thinking and behaviour in order to adapt in relation to war, and to "change their minds" (p.268), suggests that a powerful mythic tool must be involved. She identifies the notion of sacrifice in the context of ancient and "deeply ingrained....habitus" (p.268), as having enabled many to take up arms. Sacrifice is also construed as an act of healing, in this instance: healing through the self-sacrifice of war.

^{lviii} Due to the longevity of the conflict, some sections of the Tamil youth populace have become brutalised to such an extent that they become prey to incitements to violence, however the homogenisation of Tamil aggressiveness as a stereotypical whole is misplaced and one must be wary of over-generalising acts of hostility.

^{lix} He was a petty thief and womaniser, ostensibly: the note pinned to his chest warned the local populace that his punishment was a result of three warnings he had been given to change his behaviour, he had not, so punishment had been meted out for everyone to see.

^{lx} Within the current context of an escalation in violence, those who in the *past* have spoken out, are now facing retribution and are being methodically assassinated on a wide scale. Fear is also being inculcated by the killing of entirely innocent, apolitical youths.

^{lxi} There was until recently a 'Mothers Front' group in Jaffna, protesting at the disappearances of young Tamils. They disbanded among threats and intimidation.

^{lxii} Wickramasinghe (2001:52) notes that most foreign aid is pledged at a meeting of the Aid Sri Lanka Consortium through the World Bank, on behalf of the major donor countries of Europe and the US.

^{lxiii} Names have been changed throughout.

^{lxiv} Murugan is also referred to as Muruga; there is no differentiation locally.

^{lxv} In Malaysia, which has the largest concentration of Tamil Hindus outside of Sri Lanka and India, has a long history of *kaavadi* devotion and the festivals have become renowned for their spectacular interpretation of *kaavadi* practice, but not the suspended form.

^{lxvi} There is no generic term in Tamil for 'hanging' *kaavadi*. Some references include: *muullukkaavadi*, or *alakkukkaavadi* both of which refer to the hooks. In Jaffna, both *thuukku-* and *paravaikkaavadi* are commonly used to denote all forms of hanging *kaavadi*.

^{lxvii} Skantha is the sanskritised form of Murugan, he is also attributed with an emphasis on language whereas Murugan is a God of example or action.

⁶⁸The LTTE recently showed graphic pictures and film depicting deaths from the tsunami; they carried an explicit message of governmental neglect in addressing the needs of Tamils who were once again displaced and suffering huge losses.

⁶⁹They also relayed images of devastation from the Tsunami that were unseen elsewhere to show the further suffering of the Tamils.

⁷⁰There are also groups such as the Modern Primitive Movement started by Fakir Musafa who engages in extreme acts of body piercing and body art, and alludes to practices such as the Sun Dance of the Sioux tribe in North America.

⁷¹There have been very few male suicide bombers of individual targets, they tend to be used for the destruction of insentient objects: boats, buildings and installations.

⁷²I was once asked by a Tiger cadre why I wore my hair short, suggesting a dubious non-conformity on my part. Stereotypical images of 'respectable' femininity or femaleness do not translate to women cadres and begs the question how female cadres are perceived within the movement. Tough and independent certainly, but perhaps not easily accepted into mainstream life.

⁷³There were instances of Tamil journalists and other non-combatants who were given special 'Martyr' status and an LTTE burial ceremony for services to the cause.

⁷⁴The Tamil Tigers once attempted to impose their authority over a particular *thuukkukkaavadi* ritual at the time of a famous hunger strike by one of its cadres - Thileepan. Some fellow Tigers wished to show solidarity and encouragement to the hunger striker by performing a vow of *thuukkukkaavadi*; they requested that the organiser come to their camp first and perform the ceremony of inserting the hooks there. However, he only performs this task on the site of the sacred temple grounds; his protest was heard and despite attempts to persuade him otherwise, the cadres conformed to his request.

Appendix I

Glossary

<i>Nertri</i>	vow
<i>Puja</i>	temple ceremony
<i>Cantanam</i>	sandalwood paste applied to forehead
<i>Vibuthi</i>	holy ash
<i>Gopuram</i>	Hindu temple tower
<i>Pottu</i>	red forehead dot, denoting married status
<i>Thaali</i>	gold wedding necklace
<i>Vidu/veedu</i>	home
<i>Iyakkum</i>	‘the movement’ (LTTE)
<i>Vellala</i>	agriculturalist, land owning caste
<i>Satyagraha</i>	peaceful, sit down demonstration
<i>anna(n)</i>	older brother
<i>thampi</i>	younger brother
<i>Pudhu Varudam</i>	New Year
<i>Uur</i>	birth place/town
<i>Grama sevaka</i>	town councillor
<i>Parihari</i>	village healer
<i>Kurumbam</i>	family
<i>Maamiyar</i>	mothers brother
<i>Uurvai</i>	gossip
<i>Pakuti</i>	caste group
<i>Saram</i>	checked ‘lungi’ worn by men
<i>Verti/versti</i>	white ceremonial garment, worn by men
<i>Kunkuma</i>	red powder, representing Goddess
<i>Malikai</i>	herbs, often with healing powers
<i>Prasaadam/prastatham</i>	fruit offering given to worshippers after puja
<i>Vannaan</i>	washerman (Tamil)

<i>Mandapam</i>	ceremonial hall
<i>Kalyana(m)</i>	wedding
<i>Koolai</i>	wedding <i>sari</i>
<i>Ponerinkal</i>	gold melting ceremony to make wedding <i>thaali</i>
<i>Pirathathai</i>	act of devotion, rolling around temple
<i>S(h)akti</i>	Sivas consort and personification of female power
<i>Mari</i>	monsoon
<i>Pujari/kurrukal</i>	non-Brahmin priest
<i>Tuyilum illam</i>	grave stone of LTTE soldiers
<i>Veerasuvarakkam</i>	LTTE martyrs heaven
<i>Maavirar</i>	LTTE martyr
<i>Karumpupuli</i>	Black Tiger suicide cadre
<i>Kudimakkal</i>	caste group
<i>Nul</i>	Ceremonial, protective thread worn on wrist
<i>Theetham</i>	water cutting ceremony on final day of temple festival
<i>Theer</i>	ceremonial cart
<i>Payam</i>	fear
<i>Charya</i>	good, charitable acts
<i>Paravasam</i>	trance
<i>Vaakku cholluthal</i>	oracle
<i>Bhajan</i>	devotional song
<i>Bhakti</i>	devotion
<i>Gautri mantram</i>	gift of healing sight
<i>Kai parththal</i>	palm reading
<i>Manthiravathikal</i>	special healing mantras
<i>Pey</i>	ghost of dead
<i>Nagapambu</i>	cobra
<i>Thuukkukkaavadibakktharan</i>	<i>kaavadi</i> devotee
<i>Vel</i>	small silver spear
<i>Musupathi</i>	fun

<i>Aathumkaavadi</i>	dancing <i>kaavadi</i>
<i>Paalkkaavadi</i>	milk <i>kaavadi</i> (carrying pots of milk)
<i>Theerkkaavadi</i>	<i>kaavadi</i> pulling a ceremonial cart
<i>Paravaikkaavadi</i>	bird/flying <i>kaavadi</i>
<i>Thuukukkaavadi</i>	hanging <i>kaavadi</i>
<i>Thuulakkaavadi</i>	hanging with one hook
<i>Sappanankkaavadi</i>	sitting <i>kaavadi</i>
<i>Ungel</i>	swing
<i>Arohara</i>	call of devotion
<i>Iyavamsa</i>	Lord of the spears
<i>Mulamurthi</i>	Image of the deity
<i>Mauna</i>	silence
<i>Chavaal</i>	challenge
<i>Vahana</i>	Deities vehicle
<i>Mayil</i>	peacock
<i>Swami</i>	God/Guru
<i>Kumbudupora</i>	kneeling act of devotion for women
<i>Nambikkai</i>	belief
<i>Yaggasalai</i>	main temple hall
<i>Utsava murthi</i>	festival of the deity
<i>Abishekam</i>	ritual bathing of deity during festival puja

Appendix II

Tamil activist organisations in Sri Lanka

List of Tamil groups still operative in Sri Lanka

LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
EPDP	Eelam People's Democratic Party
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
TMVP (Karuna's Group)	Tamileela Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal
RAZEEK GROUP	
MOHAN GROUP	

Appendix III

Notes on Transcription

Tamil is one of the few ancient classical languages to still be spoken in the modern world. It belongs to the Dravidian system and is spoken by approximately 70 million people worldwide (Hart 1999). Spoken Tamil varies according to both region and country. In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, there are not only different pronunciations and dialects, but also vocabulary, and the differences are sufficient to make communication difficult even for native speakers at times. Differences between written and spoken Tamil are also significant: formal usage is in writing, public speeches and on the media. Colloquial Tamil on the hand, loses many grammatical endings and has no specific transcription, so whilst knowledge of formal Tamil is useful in certain circumstances, it is of little help in daily communications. There are some rules however that I have abided by when writing in italics.

Vowels

a	-	as in 'oven'
aa	-	as in 'father'
i	-	as in 'in'
ii	-	as in 'seen'
u	-	as in 'put'
		as in 'cool'
e	-	as in 'pen'
ee	-	as in 'vain'
ai	-	as in 'kite'
o	-	as in 'ox'

Consonants

c	-	'ch' or 's'
k	-	'cat'
th	-	dental stop
ll	-	retroflex lateral
zh	-	medial, lateral flap uu -
oo	-	as in 'own'

Bibliography

Allen, T. (1991) 'Understanding Alice: Uganda's Holy Spirit movement in context' **Africa** Vol. 61 (3) pp. 370-399.

Allen, T. (1998) 'The violence of healing' **Sociologus** Vol. 47 (2) pp. 101-128.

Allen, T. (1996) 'A flight from refuge' In T. Allen (Ed.) **In Search of Cool Ground** London: James Curry.

Amnesty International (2006) 'Sri Lanka: a climate of fear in the east' AI Index: ASA 37/001/2006, 3rd February 2006.

Anderson, B. (1983) **Imagined Communities** London: Verso.

Ann, A (1993) **Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers** Jaffna: LTTE International Secretariat.

Appadurai, A. (1988) 'Introduction: Place and voice in anthropological theory' **Cultural Anthropology** Vol. 3 (1) pp. 16-20.

Arasaratnam, S. (1998) [1979] 'Nationalism in Sri Lanka and the Tamils'. In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collected Identities Revisited Volume II** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 295-312.

Aretxaga, B. (1995) 'Dirty protest: symbolic overdetermination and gender in Northern Ireland ethnic violence' **Ethos** 23 (2) pp. 123-148.

Argenti-Pillen, A. (2003) **Masking Terror: How Women Contain Violence in Southern Sri Lanka** Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Asad, T. (1997) 'On torture, or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment' In A. Kleinman, V. Das and M. Lock (Eds.) **Social Suffering** London: University of California Press pp.285-308.

Ashiwa Y, Shanmugalingam N, Perera J (2003) 'Listening to voices of Jaffna: results of a social survey' **Daily News** November 11th and 12th.

Babcock, B. (1978) **The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society** Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bakhtin, M.M (1968) **Rabalais and His World** Bloomington

Bastian, S. (1998) 'Development NGOs and ethnic conflicts' In **Culture and Politics of Identity in Sri Lanka** Colombo: ICES.

Bastin, R. (1997) 'The authentic inner life: complicity and resistance in the Tamil Hindu revival' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited Vol. I** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 385-438.

Bate, B. (2006) 'Textuality and social transformation in nineteenth century Jaffna' paper presented to Tamil Studies Conference **Tropes, Territories, Competing Realities** May 11-14, 2006, Toronto.

Bateson, G. (1972) **Steps to an Ecology of Mind** New York: Ballentine Books.

Baumann, G. (1992) 'Ritual implicates 'others': rereading Durkheim in a plural society' In D. de Coppet (Ed.) **Understanding Rituals** London and New York: Routledge pp. 97-116.

BBC 2, documentary **Psychic Vietnam** May 18, 2006 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/this world>

-
- Beck, B.E.F. (1969) 'Colour and heat in south Indian ritual' **Man** Vol. 4 (4) 553-572.
- Beck, B.E.F (1970) 'The right-left division of south Indian society' **The Journal of Asian Studies** Vol. XXIX (4) pp. 779-798.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994) **The Location of Culture** London and New York: Routledge
- Boddy, J. (1988) 'Spirits and selves in northern Sudan: the cultural therapeutics of possession and trance' **American Ethnologist** Vol. 15 (1), pp. 4-27.
- Bourguignon, E (1973) **Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change** Colombus: Ohio State University Press.
- Bracken, Patrick J. (1999) 'Hidden agendas: deconstructing post traumatic stress disorder' In Patrick J. Bracken and Celia Petty (Eds.) **Rethinking the Trauma of War** London: Free Association Books pp. 38-59.
- Brighenti, F. (2003) **Shamanistic Echoes in Rituals of Hindu Devotional Ordeals** Unpublished essay, 2003.
<http://www.svabhinava.org/friend/FrancescoBrighenti/ShamanisticEchoes.php>
- Caspersz, P. (2004) 'Satyodaya, NGOs and civil society' In S.H. Hasbullah and B.M. Morrison (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp. 196-218.
- Cesaire, A. (1972) **Discourses on Colonialism** New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Comaroff, J. (1985) **Body of Power; Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People** London: Chicago University Press.

Comaroff, J. (1993) 'The diseased heart of Africa: medicine, colonialism and the black body' In S. Lindenbaum and M. Lock (Eds.) **Knowledge, Power and Praxis: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life** London: University of California Press pp.305-329.

Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. L. (1991) **Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa** London: University of Chicago Press.

Crapanzano, V. (1981) 'Rite of return: Circumcision in Morocco' In Werner R. Muensterberger and L. Bryce Boyer (Eds.) **Psychoanalytic Study of Society** Vol 9 pp. 15-36.

Csordas, Thomas. J. (1988) 'Elements of charismatic persuasion and healing' **Medical Anthropology Quarterly** Vol. 2 (2) pp. 121-142.

Csordas, Thomas. J. (1994) **Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Csordas, Thomas. J. and Kleinman, A. (1996) 'The Therapeutic Process' In C.F. Sargent and T.M. Johnson (Eds.) **Medical Anthropology: Contemporary Theory and Method** London: Praeger pp. 3-20.

Daniel, E.V. (1984) **Fluid Signs: Being a Person in the Tamil Way**. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Daniel, E.V. (1994) 'The individual in terror'. In Thomas J. Csordas (Ed.) **Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 229-247.

Daniel, E.V (1996) **Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence** Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Daniel, E.V (1998) 'Mood, moment, and mind' In V. Das et al. (Eds.) **Violence and Subjectivity** Berkeley: University of California Press pp. 333-366.

Das, V. (1997) 'Language and body: transactions in the construction of pain' In A. Kleinman, V. Das and M. Lock (Eds.) **Social Suffering** Berkeley: University of California Press pp 67-91.

Das, V. and Kleinman, A. (2001) 'Introduction' In Das et al. (Eds.) **Remaking a World** Berkeley: University of California Press pp. 1-30.

Das, V. and Poole, D. (2004) 'State and its margins: comparative ethnographies' In V. Das and D. Poole (Eds.) **Anthropology in the Margins of the State** Oxford: James Curry pp.3-34.

Davar, B. (1999) 'Indian psychoanalysis, patriarchy and Hinduism' **Anthropology and Medicine** Vol. 6 (2) pp. 173-193.

Davar, B. (1999) **Mental Health of Indian Women: A Feminist Agenda** London: Sage.

Davis, J. (1992) 'The anthropology of suffering' **Journal of Refugee Studies** Vol. 5 (2) pp. 149-161.

de Alwis, M and Hyndman, J. (2002) **Capacity-Building in Conflict Zones: A Feminist Analysis of Humanitarian Assistance in Sri Lanka** Colombo: ICES

Dein, S and Littlewood, R. (2005) 'Apocalyptic suicide: from a pathological to an eschatological interpretation' **International Journal of Social Psychiatry** Vol. 51 (3) pp. 198-210.

de Mel, N. (1998) 'Agent or victim? The Sri Lankan woman militant in the interregnum' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited Volume II** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 199-220.

de Silva, J. (1998) 'Praxis, language and silences: the JVP uprising in the 1980s' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume II** Colombo: Marga Institute pp.163-198.

de Silva, P.L. (1995) 'The efficacy of 'combat mode': organisation, political violence, affect and cognition in the case of the liberation tigers of Tamil Eelam' In P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (Eds.) **Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka** Colombo: Social Scientists' Association pp. 176-190.

de Silva, P.L. (1999) 'The growth of Tamil paramilitary nationalisms: Sinhala chauvanism and Tamil responses' In Siri Gamage and I.B. Watson (Eds.) **Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?** London: Sage pp. 89-107.

Desjarlais, R.R (1992) **Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepalese Himalayas** Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Desjarlais, R.R et al. (1995) **World Mental Health: Problems and Priorities in Low-Income Countries** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Douglas, M. (1966) **Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo** London and New York: Routledge.

Duraiswamy (1997) **Remembering Hindu Traditions** Colombo: Gunasena.

Eco, U. (1986) **Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality** London: Minerva.

Edgar, A. and Sedgwick, P. (1999) **Key Concepts in Cultural Theory** London and New York: Routledge.

Eisenbruch, M. (1991) 'From post traumatic stress disorder to cultural bereavement: diagnosis of Southeast Asian refugees' **Social Science and Medicine** Vol. 33 (6) pp673-680.

Eliade, M. (1958) **Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth** New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Elkins, J. (1999) **Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis** Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1976) **Witches, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande** Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fabian, J. (1990) 'Peace and representation: the other and anthropological writing' **Critical Inquiry** Vol. 16 (4) pp. 753-772.

Fabrega, H. (1993) 'Biomedical psychiatry as an object for a critical medical anthropology'. In S. Lindenbaum and M. Lock (eds.) **Knowledge, Power and Praxis** London: University of California Press.

Fanon, F. (1963) **The Wretched of the Earth** New York: Grove Press

Farmer, P. (1997) 'On suffering and structural violence: a view from below' In A. Kleinman, V. Das and M. Lock (Eds.) **Social Suffering** London: University of California Press pp.261-284.

Feldman, A. (1991) **Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political terror in Northern Ireland.** London: The University of Chicago Press.

Feldman, A. (1998) 'Violence and vision' In V. Das et al. (Eds.) **Violence and Subjectivity** London: University of California Press pp. 46-78.

Feldman, A. (2004) 'On cultural anesthesia: from *desert storm* to *Rodney King*' In N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Eds.) **Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology** Oxford: Blackwell pp. 207-216.

Fleming, C. (2004) **René Girard: Violence and Mimesis** Cambridge: Polity Press.

Foucault, M. (1971) **Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason** London and New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M. 2004 [1978] 'The right of death and power over life' In N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois **Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology** Oxford: Blackwell pp. 79-82.

French, (1994) 'The political economy of injury and compassion: amputees on the Thai-Cambodian border' In Thomas J. Csordas (Ed.) **Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self** London: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 69-99.

Fuller, C.J. (2004) **The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India** Oxford: Princeton University Press

Fuller Collins, E. (1997) **Pierced by Murugan's Lance: Ritual, Power, and Moral Redemption among Malaysian Hindus**. DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press.

Galapatti, A. (2005) 'Reflections on post-tsunami psychosocial work' In **Intervention** Vol 3, (1) pp. 65-69.

Gamage, S. (1999) 'Post independent political conflicts in Sri Lanka: elites, ethnicity, and class contradictions' In Sri Gamage and I.B. Watson (Eds.) **Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or 'Island of Tears'?** London: Sage pp. 325-355.

Gamburd, M.R. (2000) **The Kitchen Spoon's Handle: Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's Migrant Housemaids** Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gamburd, M.R. (2004) 'The economics of enlisting: a village view of armed service' In Deborah Winslow and Michael D. Woost (Eds.) **Economy, Culture, and Civil War in Sri Lanka** Bloomington: Indiana University Press pp. 151-167.

Ganappatti, A. (2005) 'Psychosocial work in the aftermath of the tsunami: challenges for service provision in Batticaloa. Eastern Sri Lanka' **Intervention** Vol. 3 (1) pp. 65-69.

Ganesvaran, T., Subramaniam, S and Mahadevan, K. (1984) 'Suicide in a northern town of Sri Lanka' **Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica** Vol 69 pp.420-425.

Gell, A. (1980) 'The gods at play: vertigo and possession in Muria religion' **Man** Vol. 15 (2) pp. 219-248.

Gilsenan, M. 'On conflict and violence' In Jeremy MacClancy (Ed.) **Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines** London: Chicago University Press pp. 99-113.

Girard, R. (1972) **Violence and the Sacred**. London: Continuum (transl. Patrick Gregory).

Glucklich, A. (2001) **Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gluckman, M. (1963a) **Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa** New York: Free Press.

Gluckman, M. (1963b) 'Gossip and scandal' **Current Anthropology** Vol 4, (3), pp. 307-315.

Goffman, E. (1968) [1963] **Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity** Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Goffman, E. (1971) **Relations in Public: The Micro-Politics of Public Order** London: Allen Lane.

Good, B. (1992) 'Culture and psychopathology: directions for psychiatric anthropology' In T. Schwarz, G.M. White and C.A. Lutz, (Eds.) **New Directions in Psychological Anthropology** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.181-205.

Good, B. (1994) **Medicine, Rationality, and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Green, L. (1998) 'Lived lives and social suffering: problems and concerns in medical anthropology' In **Medical Anthropology Quarterly** New Series Vol.12, No. 1, pp. 3-7.

Green, L. (2004) 'Living in a state of fear' In N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Eds.) **Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology** London: Blackwell Publishing pp.186-195.

Gunaratna, R. (1987) **War and Peace in Sri Lanka** Institute of Fundamental Studies: Sri Lanka.

Gunaratna, R. (1990) **Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP** Institute of Fundamental Studies: Sri Lanka.

Gunatilleke, G. (1998) 'The ideologies and realities of the ethnic conflict – a post face' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume II** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 363-432.

Harrell-Bond, B. (1986) **Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harrell-Bond, B. (2000) 'Foreward' In F.L Ahearn Jr. (Ed.) **Psychosocial Wellness of Refugees** Oxford: Berghahn Books p. xiii.

Hart, K. (1999) **Tamil for Beginners** London: University of California.

Hasbullah, S.H. (2004) 'Justice for the dispossessed: the case of a forgotten minority in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict' In S.H. Hasbullah and B.M. Morrison (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp. 221-240.

Heidegger, M. (1962) [1927] **Being and Time** (transl. John McQuarrie and Edward Robinson) Oxford: Blackwell.

Hellmann-Rajanayagam, D. (2004) 'Religious ideology among the Tamils' In S.H Hasbullah and B.M. Morrison (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp. 72-84.

Hellmann-Rajanayagam, D. (2004) 'From differences to ethnic solidarity among the Tamils' In S.H. Hasbullah and B.M. Morrison (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp. 102-125.

Hobsbawm, E. (1987) **The Age of Empire, 1875-1914** London: Abacus.

Hobsbawm, E. (1994) **The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991** London: Abacus.

Holmes, R.W. (1980) **Jaffna (Sri Lanka, 1980)** Jaffna: St. Joseph's Catholic Press.

Honwana, A. (2005) **Child Soldiers in Africa** Penn Press: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hoole et al (1990) **The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka – An Inside Account** Sri Lankan Studies Institute: Claremont, CA.

Hoole, R. (2001) **Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power - Myths, Decadence and Murder** University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna): Wasala Publications.

Jeganathan, P. (1995) 'Authorizing history, ordering land: the conquest of Anuradhapura' In P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (Eds.) **Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka** Colombo: Social Scientists' Association pp. 106-136.

Jeganathan, P. (1998) 'All the lord's men? ethnicity and inequality in the space of a riot' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume II** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 221-246.

Jeganathan, P. and Ismail Q. (1995) 'Introduction: unmaking the nation' In P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (Eds.) **Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka** Colombo: Social Scientists' Association pp. 2-9.

Jenkins, R. (2002) 'Imagined but not imaginary: ethnicity and nationalism in the modern world' In Jeremy MacClancy (Ed.) **Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines** London: Chicago University Press pp.114-128.

Jones, L. (2003) **Then They Started Shooting: Growing Up in War Torn Bosnia.** London: Harvard University Press.

Kakar, S. (1990) 'Some unconscious aspects of ethnic violence in India'. In Veena Das (Ed.) **Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia** Oxford: Oxford University Press pp.135 – 146.

Kapferer, B. (1983) **A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka** Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Kapferer, B. (1988) **Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia** Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Kapferer, B. (1997) **The Feast of the Sorcerer: Practices of Consciousness and power in Sri Lanka** Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Katiresu, S. (2004) [1905] **A Handbook to the Jaffna Peninsula and a Souvenir of the Opening of the Railway to the North** New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

Kirmayer, L. (1993) 'Healing and the invention of metaphor: the effectiveness of symbols revisited' **Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry** Vol. 17 pp. 161-195.

Kleinman, A. (1980) **Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland Between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry** London: University of California Press.

Kleinman, A. (1996) **Writing at the Margin: Discourse Between Anthropology and Medicine** London: University of California Press.

Krishna, S. (1998) 'Divergent narratives: Dravidian and Eelamist Tamil nationalisms'. In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume II** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 315-346.

Krishna, S. (2001) 'India's role in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict' In M. Roberts, G. Gunatilleke and D. Nesiah (Eds.) **A History of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Recollection, Reinterpretation and Reconciliation** Monograph No. 3 Colombo: Marga Institute.

Krishnapillai, V. (1998) 'Vel worship in Sri Lanka'
<http://www.kataragama.org/research/krishnapillai.htm>

Lan, D. (1985) **Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe** James Curry, London: University of California Press.

Langer, L.L. (1991) **Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory** New Haven: Random House.

Langer, L.L. (1997) 'The alarmed vision: social suffering and holocaust atrocity'. In A. Kleinman, V. Das, M. Lock (Eds.) **Social Suffering** London: University of California Press pp.47-66.

Last, M. (1990) 'Professionalisation of indigenous healers' In T.M. Johnson and C.F Sargent (Eds.) **Medical Anthropology: Contemporary Theory and Method** London: Praeger pp. 349-366.

Last, M. (2000) 'Reconciliation and memory in postwar Nigeria' In Das et al. (Eds.) **Violence and Subjectivity** London: University of California Press.

Lawrence, P. (1998) 'Grief on the body: the work of oracles in Eastern Sri Lanka' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume II** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 271-290.

Lawrence, P. (2000) 'Violence, suffering Amman: the work of oracles in Sri Lanka's eastern war zone' In V. Das et al. **Violence and Subjectivity** London: Univeristy of California Press pp. 171-204.

Leach, E. (1976) **Culture and Communication** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, I.M (1989) **Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism** 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge

Library of Congress (2005) 'A country study: Sri Lanka' Federal Research Division, November, 2005.

Lipsedge, M. and Littlewood, R. (1997) 'Psychopathology and its public sources: from a provisional typology to a dramaturgy of domestic sieges' **Anthropology and Medicine** Vol. 4 (1) pp. 25-43.

Littlewood, R. (1984) 'The individual articulation of shared symbols' **Journal of Operational Psychiatry** Vol. 15 pp. 17-24.

Littlewood, R. (1995) 'Psychopathology and personal agency: modernity, culture change and eating disorders in South Asian societies' **British Journal of Medical Psychology** Vol. 68 pp. 45-63.

Littlewood, R. 'Military rape' **Anthropology Today** Vol. 13 (2) pp.7-16.

Littlewood, R. (1998) **The Butterfly and the Serpent: Essays in Psychiatry, Race and Religion** London: Free Association Books.

Littlewood, R. (2002) 'Trauma and the Kanun: two responses to loss in Albania and Kosovo' **International Journal of Social Psychiatry** Vol. 48 pp. 86-96.

Littlewood, R. (2004) 'From elsewhere: prophetic visions and dreams among the people of the earth'. **Dreaming** Vol. 14, No. 2-3, pp. 94-106.

Lorenz, K. (1963) **On Aggression** London: Bantam Books.

Lydersen (2004) 'Grim news in Central America: wave of gang violence grows'.
<http://www.americas.org>

Malkki, L.H. (1995) 'Purity and exile: violence, memory and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania' In N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Eds.) **Violence and War: An Anthology** London: Blackwell pp. 129-135.

Maunaguru, S. (1995) 'Gendering Tamil nationalism: the construction of 'woman' in projects of protest and control' In P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (Eds.) **Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka** Colombo: Social Scientists' Association pp.158-175.

McDowell, C. (1996) **A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland** Oxford: Berghahn Books.

McGilvray, D.B. (1999) 'Tamils and Muslims in the shadow of war: schism or continuity?' In Siri Gamage and I.B. Watson (Eds.) **Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?** London: Sage pp. 217-228.

McGilvray, D.B. (1982) 'Mukkuvar Vannimai: Tamil caste and matriclan ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka' In D.B. McGilvray (Ed.) **Caste Ideology and Interaction** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 34-97.

Media Coordinator, LTTE, December 27th, 2003, <http://www.tamilnet.com>

Mellor, P.A. and Shilling, C. (1997) 'Introduction' **Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity** London: Sage pp. 1-34.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1963) **The Primacy of Perception** Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Moore, M. (1985) **The State and Peasant Politics in Sri Lanka** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morris, D.B. ((1997) 'About suffering: voice, genre, and moral community' In A. Kleinman, V. Das and M. Lock (Eds.) **Social Suffering** London: University of California Press pp. 25-46.

Morrison, B.M. (2004) 'Overwhelming change and faltering institutions, 1948-2002' In S.H Hasbullah and B.M. Morrison (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of**

Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp. 25-54.

Murphy, W. P. (2003) 'Military patrimonialism and child soldier clientalism in the Liberian and Sierra Leonian civil wars' **African Studies Review** Vol. 46 (2) pp. 61-87.

Muttucumaraswamy, V. (1965) **Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar - The Champion Reformer of the Hindus (1822-1879): A Biographical Study** Jaffna: Navalar Press.

Nabokov, I. (2000) **Religion Against the Self: An Ethnography of Tamil Rituals** Oxford: Oxford university Press.

National Peace Council (2003) **Costs of War: Challenges and Priorities for the Future** Colombo: Marga Institute.

Needham, R. (1979) **Symbolic Classification** Santa Monica: Goodyear.

Neelakanthan, K. (1998) 'Canittayan: Celva Cannitti Murukan' paper presented at the First International Conference Seminar on Skanda-Murugan in Chennai 1998.
<http://www.kataragama.org>

Nelson, D.M. (2004) 'Anthropologist discovers legendary two-faced Indian! margins, the state, and duplicity in post-war Guatemala' In V. Das and D. Poole (Eds.) **Anthropology in the Margins of the State** Oxford: James Curry pp.117-140.

Neubert, D. (2004) 'The 'peacemakers' dilemma': the role of NGOs in processes of peace-building in decentralised conflicts' In Foblets, M-C and von Trotha, T. (Eds.) **Healing the Wounds of War: Essays on the Reconstruction of Societies after War** Oxford: Hart Publishing pp. 47-77.

Newman, J. (2003) 'Narrating displacement: oral histories of Sri Lankan women'
Working paper series, Refugee Studies Centre: Oxford University.

Nordstrom, C. (2004) **Shadows of War: Violence, power, and international Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century**. London: University of California Press.

Obeyesekere, G. (1977) 'Social change and the deities: rise of the Kataragama cult in modern Sri Lanka' **Man** Vol. 12 pp. 377-396.

Obeyesekere, G. (1978) 'The fire-walkers of Kataragama: the rise of bhakti religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka' **The Journal for Asian Studies** Vol. 37 (3) pp. 457-476.

Obeyesekere, G. (1981) **Medusa's Hair: an Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience** London: University of Chicago Press.

Obeyesekere, G. (1984) **The Cult of the Goddess Pattini** London: University of Chicago Press.

Obeyesekere, G. (1993) **Sorcery, Premeditated Murder and the Canalisation of Aggression in Sri Lanka** Colombo: Studies in Society and Culture.

Ots, T. (1994) 'The silenced body – the expressive *Leib*: on the dialectic of mind and life in Chinese cathartic healing' In Thomas J. Csordas (Ed.) **Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 116-136.

Parkin, D. (1994) 'Islam, symbolic hegemony and the problem of bodily expression' In S. Heald and A. Deluz **Anthropology and Psychoanalysis: An Encounter through Culture** London and New York: Routledge pp. 54-69.

Perera, N. (1999) 'Colonialism and national space: representations of Sri Lanka' In Siri Gamage and I.B. Watson (Eds.) **Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'?** London: Sage Publications Ltd pp. 23-48.

Perera S. (1995) **Living with Torturers and Essays of Intervention: Sri Lankan Society, Culture and Politics in Perspective** Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Perera, S. (2001) 'Spirit possessions and avenging ghosts: stories of supernatural activity as narratives of terror and mechanisms of coping and remembering' In V. Das et al. (Eds.) **Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery** London: University of California Press pp. 157-200.

Perinbanayagam R.S (1982) **The Karmic Theater: Self, Society, and Astrology in Jaffna** Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

Pfaffenberger, B. (1990) 'The political construction of defensive nationalism: the 1968 temple-entry crisis in northern Sri Lanka' **Journal of Asian Studies** Vol. 49 (1) February, pp. 78-96.

Pinnawala, S. (2004) 'Damming the flood of violence' In S.H. Hasbullah and B. M.Morrison (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp. 254-278.

Punamaki, R-L. (2000) 'Measuring suffering: conflicts and solutions in refugee studies' In F.L Ahearn Jr. (Ed.) **Psychosocial Wellness of Refugees: Issues in Qualitative and Quantitative Research** Oxford: Berghahn Books pp105-130.

Rabinow, P. (1984) **The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought** London: Penguin Books.

Rappaport, R. (1999) **Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rapport, N., Overing J. (2000) **Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts** London and New York: Routledge.

Refugee Council (2004) 'Breakdown of the rule of law' **Sri Lanka Monitor**, January-March 2004.

Ravikumar (2002) 'Caste of the tiger: Dalits among Sri Lanka Tamils' www.himalmag.com/2002/august/perspective.htm

Reynolds, P. (2005) 'Reclaiming childhood: a symposium on early childhood care and education' **Seminar** February, 2005 <http://india-seminar.com/2005/546/546>

Richardson, J.M. Jnr. (2004) 'Violent conflict and the first half decade of open economy policies in Sri Lanka: a revisionist view' In D. Winslow and M.D. Woost (Eds.) **Economy, Culture, and Civil War in Sri Lanka** Indianapolis, Bloomington: Indiana University Press pp. 41-72.

Ricoeur, P. (1996) **Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action** London: Sage.

Robben, A.C.G.M (2000) 'The assault on basic trust: disappearance, protest, and reburial in Argentina' In A.C.G.M Robben and M.M. Suarez-Orozco (Eds.) **Cultures Under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 70-101.

Robben, A.C.G.M. (2005) **Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina**. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Roberts, M. (1997) [1979] 'Elite formation and elites, 1832-1931' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities, Volume I** Colombo: Marga Institute pp.191-266.

Roberts, M. (1997) [1979] 'Stimulants and ingredients in the awakening of latter-day nationalism' In M. Roberts (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities, Volume I** Colombo: Marga Institute pp. 267-292.

Roberts, M. (2005) **Narrating Tamil Nationalism: Subjectivities and Issues** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications.

Rodgers, D. (2002) "'We live in a state of siege": violence, crime, gangs in post-conflict urban Nicaragua' LSE, Working paper series No. 02-36.
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/depts/destin>

Rosaldo, R. (1987) 'Politics, patriarchs, and laughter' **Cultural Critique** No. 6 pp. 65-86.

Rosaldo, R. (1989) 'Grief and a head-hunter's rage' In N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Eds.) **Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology** London: Blackwell pp. 150-156.

Rosel, J. (2004) 'Democracy and ethnic conflicts: the politics of ethnicity and conflict resolution in South Asia'. In M-C Foblets and T. von Trutz (Eds.) **Healing the Wounds: Essays on the Reconstruction of Societies after War** Oxford: Hart Publishing pp. 201-220.

Roseman, M. (2002) 'Making sense out of modernity' In M. Nichter and M. Lock (Eds.) **New Horizons in Medical Anthropology: Essays in Honour of Charles Leslie** London and New York: Routledge pp.111-140.

Ross, F. (2001) 'Speech and silence: women's testimony in the first five weeks of public hearings of the South African truth and reconciliation commission' In V. Das et al. (Eds.) **Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery** London: University of California Press pp. 250-280.

Ryan, B.F. (2004) [1953] **Caste in Modern Ceylon: The Sinhalese System in Transition.** New Delhi: Navrang.

Sales, R. (1983) **English Literature in History, 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics** London: Hutchinson.

Saveri, N.M (1996) **Jaffna: The Land of the Lute** Jaffna: Tirumarai Kalamanram.

Saverimuttu, T; Sriskandarajah, N; Jayapalan, V.I.S (1999) 'Ecological consequences of the war in the Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka' Research Report **Economic, Socio-Political and Human Costs of the War in Sri Lanka, 2002** Colombo: National Peace Council and the Marga Institute pp. 72-78.

Scarry, E. (1985) **The Body in Pain.** London: Oxford University Press.

Schalk, P. (1997) 'The revival of martyr cults among Ilavar' **Tenemos 33** pp. 151-190.

Scheff, T.J. (1977) 'The distancing of emotion in ritual' **Current Anthropology** Vol. 18 (3), pp. 483-505.

Scheff, T.J. (1979) **Catharsis in Healing, Ritual, and Drama** London: University of California Press.

Scheper-Hughes, N. (1992) **Death Without Weeping** London: University of California Press

Scheper-Hughes, N. (2004) 'Introduction: making sense of violence' In N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Eds.) **Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology** Oxford: Blackwell pp.1-32.

Scheper-Hughes, N and Lock, M. (1987) 'The mindful body: a prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology' **Medical Anthropology Quarterly** Vol.1 pp. 6-41.

Schivelbusch, W. (2001) **The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery** London: Granta Books.

Scott, J.C. (1985) **Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance** New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Scott, J.C. (1990) **Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts** New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Shanmugalingam, N. (1990) 'From ghora to bhogra: role change and rise of the goddess Turkkai in Yalppanam' In P. Schalk (Ed.) **Lanka 5** December 1990 Uppsala: Uppsala University pp. 186-200.

Shanmuga Priya (2004) **Nallur Kanthaswamy: A Spiritual Experience**. Nallur, Jaffna: Valluvar Press.

Shaw, R. (2002) 'Spirit memoryscape' In **Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone**. Pp. 46-69 Chicago: Chicago Univeristy Press.

Sivathamby, K. (1995) **Sri Lankan Tamil Society and Politics** Madras: New Century Book House.

Sivathamby, K. (2005) **Being a Tamil and Sri Lankan** Colombo: Aivakam.

Skultans, V. (1987) 'The management of mental illness among Maharashtrian families: a case study of a Mahanubhav healing temple' **Man** (N.S) Vol. 22 No.4 pp. 661-679.

Somasundaram, D.J. (1996) 'Post traumatic responses to aerial bombing' **Social Science and Medicine** Vol. 42 pp. 1465-1471.

Somasundaram, D.J. (1998) **Scarred Minds: The Psychological Impact of War on Sri Lankan Tamils** New Delhi: Sage.

Somasundaram, D.J. (2003) 'Collective trauma in Sri Lanka' **The International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counseling in Areas of Armed Conflict** Vol. 1 (1) pp. 4-13.

Somasundaram, D.J. et al. (1999) 'Starting mental health services in Cambodia' **Social Science and Medicine** Vol. 48 pp. 1029-1046.

Somasundaram, D.J. and Sivayokan, S. (2000) (Eds.) **Mental Health in the Tamil Community** Jaffna, Sri Lanka: Shanthiam.

Spencer, J. (1990) (Ed.) **Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of the Conflict** London and New York: Routledge.

Spencer, J. (1990) 'Writing within: anthropology, nationalism and culture in Sri Lanka (and comments and reply)' **Current Anthropology** Vol. 31 (3) pp. 283-300.

Spencer, J. (1997) 'On not becoming a "terrorist": problems of memory, agency, and community in the Sri Lankan conflict' In V. Das et al. (Eds.) **Violence and Subjectivity** London: University of California Press pp. 120-140.

Sri Lanka Project, The Refugee Council (2001) **Sri Lanka: Human Rights and Return of Refugees** Refugee Council, UK.

Stallybrass, P. and White, A. (2002) 'The politics and poetics of transgression' In Lambek M. (Ed.) **A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion** Oxford: Blackwell pp. 275-288.

Stirrat, R.L (1999) 'The new orthodoxy and old truths: participation, empowerment and other buzz words' In S. Bastain and N. Bastian (Eds.) **Assessing Participation: A Debate from South Asia** New Delhi: Konark pp. 67-92.

Suarez-Orozco, M. (1990) 'Speaking of the unspeakable: toward a psycho-social understanding of responses to terror' **Ethos** Vol. 18 (3) 353-383.

Suarez-Orozco, M. and Robben, A.C.G.M. (2000) **Cultures Under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sumathy, S. (2004) 'The rise of militant Tamil nationalism, its assumptions and the cultural production of Tamil women. In S.H Hasbullah and B.M. Morrison, (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp.126-149.

Summerfield, D. (1995) 'Raising the dead: war, reparation, and the politics of memory' **British Medical Journal** Vol. 311 pp. 495-497.

Summerfield, D. (1999) 'A critique of seven assumptions behind psychological trauma programmes in war-affected areas' **Social Science and Medicine** Vol. 48 pp. 1449-1462.

Summerfield, D. (2000) 'War and mental health: a brief overview' **British Medical Journal** Vol. 321 pp. 232-235.

Summerfield, D. (2001) 'The invention of post-traumatic stress disorder and the social usefulness of a psychiatric category' **British Medical Journal** Vol. 322 pp. 95-98.

Tambiah, H.W. (2000) **The Laws and Customs of the Tamils of Jaffna (Revised ed.)** Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo: Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd.

Tambiah, S.J. (1986) **Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy**. London: Chicago University Press.

Tambiah, S.J. (1996) **Levelling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia** London: University of California Press.

Taussig, M. (1987) **Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thiruchandran, S. (1999) **The Other Victims of War: Emergence of Female Headed Households in eastern Sri Lanka, Volume II** Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo: Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd.

Trawick, M. (1999) 'Reasons for violence: a preliminary ethnographic account of the LTTE' In Siri Gamage and I.B. Watson (Eds.) **Conflict and Community in**

Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the East' or the 'Island of Tears'? London: Sage pp. 139-164.

Trawick, M. (2002) 'Killing and healing revisited: on cultural difference, warfare and sacrifice' In M. Nichter and M. Lock (Eds.) **New Horizons in Medical Anthropology: Essays in Honour of Charles Leslie** London and New York: Routledge pp. 267-296.

Tribe, R. (1999) 'Bridging the gap or damming the flow? Some observations on using interpreters/bicultural workers when working with refugee clients, many of whom have been tortured' **British Journal of Medical Psychology** Vol. 72 pp. 567-576.

Turner, S. (1995) 'Torture, refugees and trust' In E.V Daniel and J.C Knudsen (Eds.) **Mistrusting Refugees** London: University of California Press pp. 56-72.

Turner, S. and Gorst-Unsworth, C. (1990) 'Psychological sequelae of torture: a descriptive model' **British Journal of Psychiatry** Vol. 157 pp. 475-480.

Turner, V.W. (1969) **The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure**. Chicago: Aldine.

University Teachers for Human Rights. (2004) Reports on the Human Rights situation in the North and the East. <http://www.uthr.org>

Van Gennep, A. (1960) [1909] **The Rites of Passage** London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wallace, A.F.C. (1997) [1970] 'Revitalisation movements' In Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers (Eds.) **Magic, Witchcraft and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural** London: Mayfield Publishing Company pp. 336-341.

Ward, C. (1984) 'Thaipusam in Malaysia: a psycho-anthropological analysis of ritual trance, ceremonial possession, and self-mortification practices' **Ethos** Vol. 12 (4) pp. 307-334.

Warren, K. (1997) 'Mayan multiculturalism and the violence of memories' In V. Das et al. (Eds.) **Social Suffering** London: University of California Press pp. 296-314.

Wavell, S., Butt, A and Epton, N (1966) **Trances** London: George Allen and Unwin.

Waxler-Morrison, N. (2004) 'Who will care for those left at home? The effect of new opportunities for work on families in Sri Lanka'. In S.H Hasbullah and Barrie M. Morrison (Eds.) **Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalisation: Struggling to Create a New Social Order** Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications pp. 241-253.

Wickramasinghe, N. (2001) **Civil Society in Sri Lanka: New Circles of Power**. New Delhi: Sage.

Wilford, A. (2000) "'Weapons of the meek': ecstatic ritualism and strategic ecumenism among Tamil-Hindus in Malaysia' **Identities** Vol. 9 (2) pp. 247-280.

Williams, S. J. and Bendelow, G. (1998) **The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues** London and New York: Routledge.

Wilson, J.A. (1998) 'The politics of ethnicity and ethno-nationalisms in Asia' In **Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume II** pp. 347-355, ed. M.Roberts. Colombo: Marga Institute.

Winslow, D. and Woost, M.D. 'Articulations of economy and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka'. In D. Winslow and M.D. Woost (Eds.) **Economy, Culture and Civil War in Sri Lanka** Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press pp. 1-27.

Wood, M. (2002) **The Smile of Murugan: A South Indian Journey** London: John Murray.

Young, A. (1990) **The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**. Chichester: Princeton University Press.

Young, A. (1997) 'Suffering and the origins of traumatic memory' In A. Kleinman, V. Das and M. Lock (Eds.) **Social Suffering** London: University of California Press pp.245-260.